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Move, Make, Imagine:  
Bringing Imaginal, Embodied and Relational Consciousness to Change Work

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Ashridge Doctorate in Organizational Change

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies  
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## Contents

Abstract		3
Thanks		5
Introduction		6
Part I: Bringing Imaginal, Embodied and Relational Consciousness to Change Work		
Chapter One	Autobiofictional Inquiry: Haven and Keira	20
Chapter Two	Big Theory: A Promise of Interconnectedness	41
	2.1 Journey into the Cosmos	43
	2.3 Journey into the Psyche	45
	2.3 An Archaeological Journey	50
	2.4 Communicative Action as Fertile Ground for Inquiry	54
Chapter Three	Granular Theory: Ingredients for Doing Inquiry	58
	3.1 Fiction and the Crafting of a Feminist Epistemology	60
	3.2 Epistemology and Voice	65
	3.3 Writing as a Path to Knowing: Autoethnography, Stories, Poems & Dream Work	81
Chapter Four	Pause and Transition to Part II	116
Part II: Performance Theory and Practice as a Radical Approach to Change		120
Chapter Five	The Promise of a Performative Consciousness	126
Chapter Six	A Pedagogy of Performance	130
	6.1 The Imaginal Journey	132
	6.2 Physical Participation	151
	6.3 Relational Commitment	163
Chapter Seven	Value and Pleasure	167
Part III: Reflections on Ongoing Inquiry		173
Epilogue		179
References		187
Bibliography		192

## **Abstract**

Haven is a wholesome girl with big teeth who comes from Maine. She has lived in Spain for years, so she is not so innocent anymore. Perhaps that is why she began to lurk around this inquiry, wending her savvy way into autoethnographical experiments, turning them, sometimes, into fiction. Reality exasperates her, despite her love of the breathing planet and of Fritjoff Capra's prose, despite her suspicion of his self-indulgence. She is less simple than she seemed when she first knocked on the door and joined the work to be done on doctoral matters. I now see that she began to subvert things, however subtly, early on. I have trouble nailing her down, but then that may be my own shortcoming.

Keira, on the other hand, brazenly sauntered into Haven's and my inquiry scoffing at doctoral work altogether. She is getting on with life, refusing all the while to see that this is serious (isn't it?). We might not get this right, Haven and I, if Keira keeps living life at such a pace, a siren to everyone, including Haven. She keeps surviving and laughing and breaking down at such a relentless pace. Her wake is full of color and fright. She is both warm and violent.

Haven can tell you that writing about how I have changed through writing stories has led us through discoveries of psychoanalytic theory, theatre, autoethnography, feminist theory, poetry, ecology and more. When we had to do work we dove into Performance Studies and what a world of possibilities is there for our intention of creating spaces in which people can learn and flourish. The qualities of such spaces are, for us, centered around embracing deep imagination, promoting bodily involvement and engaging with others. These have become the three pillars of our thesis.

Part I of the thesis explores personal writing, including poetry, fiction, autoethnography, journaling and essays to address personal change in an artful manner. I get to know Haven and Keira in the early chapters and they have inquired with me, first into the bigger context of my changing -such as our ecology and philosophical grounding- and then into more granular, methodological possibilities -such as autoethnography, and writing poetry and fiction. Part I includes an initial reflection on extending this work out into the greater world beyond myself and my interactions with Haven and Keira.

Part II looks at the theory and practice of what happens when I, with all the influence that both Haven and Keira have on this inquiry, apply the learning and practices acquired in Part I to my work with others. I engage with the theory of performance studies as I chart my own attempts at using theatre to help corporate participants express and work with some of the contradictions and restrictions of their work and lives. A host of authors and thinkers have nudged us along. I have integrated our interactions with them throughout the text to show the theoretical ground on which we have written, spoken, poeticized, acted and reflected. This thesis records our journey towards ways to change with grace, to create without massive destruction and to honor and love as we playfully dismantle.

## **Thanks**

I am grateful to Haven and Keira for forcing their way, sometimes not so playfully, into this inquiry.

I thank the Ashridge faculty for guiding and accompanying us inspiringly and inquiringly throughout the journey, with special thanks to James, who landed himself a quirky group.

Tree Group, in all its forms, has undoubtedly sustained me.

Special thanks to the Bled Heads, Mike Stanford and Paul Stanley, for much feedback, commiseration and inspiration; and to Pleuntje van Meer and Michelle Martin for your great minds and warm friendship and invaluable help along the way.

Thanks to Brian McCarthy for making much of this work happen in real life.

Thanks to Rory for always believing in me and challenging me to do better and be better in all that I take on.

Thank you to Sam, Henry, Jackson, Mia and Oliver for being my joy and inspiration, for your endurance and for never doubting that I would get... somewhere. We have arrived together.

## Introduction

Out for a run on a rainy Saturday morning in March, I realized, as I imagined writing an email to Prof. Mike Rosenberg, who recommended me for ADOC, that I have fulfilled the initial purpose for which I embarked on this doctoral journey: I was seeking intellectual grounding for my practice in design and delivery of leadership development; I also wished for a community of curious people with whom I could share, discuss and develop ideas; and I hoped, through writing, to contribute to my field as a designer and deliverer of leadership development, to my communities of learning and practice and to my own reflective practice (Schön, 1983).

My realization as I ran was that, despite all manner of self doubt and competing narratives, I believe I have arrived: I have found the strands of thought for which my intuition was groping five years ago; I have a community of learning in my doctoral colleagues but also in other people around me who share a holistic approach and curiosity for how people learn, lead and live; and I am writing. This text aims to show the main ways in which I, my research and my practice are developing and to what purpose, for myself, for my community of learning and for the fields of leadership development and organizational change. My main claim, running throughout –though never smoothly, sometimes haltingly, butting up against theories, snagging on experience, languishing in occasional silence- is that without venturing into our own realms of imagination in a way that is embodied and relational, we cannot hope to change ourselves, our organizations or our world in a way that is genuine and lasting.

The theory of change that I put forth in this thesis is that change requires that we venture deep into our imagination in a way that is both embodied and relational. These three elements -imagination, the body and relationality- contribute to positive sustainable change interdependently: imagination opens up the realm of possibilities, drawing on our storied humanity; the body unequivocally involves our identities, politics and being in the world; and our relationships constitute the testing ground and ultimate sign of success or failure of whatever change we enact. I will explore each of these three areas through various methods and in relation to a series of theoretical groundings. The methods used in this research are largely creative, experiential and aesthetic. The theoretical lenses I use tend toward non-positivist, constructivist and feminist approaches to knowledge and practice.

In the coming paragraphs I reflect on where to locate this research in a current map of the academic and practitioner landscape from which I have drawn context and theoretical grounding. I have asked myself which scholars and/or practitioners out there today might want to read my work or engage with this research and theory of change?

A good proportion of the research for this inquiry has involved reading foundational texts such as Lyotard, Foucault, Wolff, Gilman, Habermas, Freire, Schön and others. It has also drawn on several recent bodies of scholarship which are closer to the here and now and which locate the work in a current map of the academic and practitioner landscape. Both Part I, on the development of a first-person inquiry method through stories, and Part II, on the development of a performative learning experience using Forum Theatre, are essentially about getting to know the world more deeply and critically through imaginal, embodied and relational knowing for the purpose of embracing change in a more felt and holistic way. The main theoretical or scholarly territories that have informed this journey can be categorized as follows:

- Action research on extended epistemology: The premise of engaging an extended epistemology underlies the inquiry as a whole and relies on the work of Peter Reason and Bill Torbert (2001) who expressed four complementary ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. The extended epistemology has been taken up by a number of action researchers, among them Marshall (2008), Seeley and Reason (2008), Seeley (2011), Kemmis (2008), Ladkin & Taylor (2010) and Ken and Mary Gergen (2012), among others. The present work, most similarly perhaps to Seeley and the Gergens, explores presentational knowing in the fields of writing as inquiry and doing theatre work in leadership development, because of a concern that while presentational knowing is key to a deep, critical and felt understanding of situations, it is conspicuously lacking in today's organizations and individuals. My approach to change work has developed in dialogue with this work on extending our epistemologies to better access our whole selves and thus benefit from broader possibilities. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Section 4, extending our epistemologies presents a way of bringing together what Habermas (1985) refers to as the "system world" and the "life world" in an attempt to reach for a fuller existence and a more holistic view of our human condition.



- Feminist theory on voice and relational work: my way of changing and improving my own reality appears to me as related to and having an effect upon my being in the world as a woman. Finding my voice, despite intimidating challenges from members of my immediate surroundings who were challenged and threatened by the areas I was exploring, has been central to the inquiry. I was shocked at times that I seemed to be fighting against forces that Wolff, Gilman and other early feminist had written about a hundred years ago. Feminist writing of the 1970's to 1990's (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1985; Harstock, 1987; Baker Miller, 1976; hooks, 1991; Belenky et al., 1986; Winterson, 1992) gave me a sense of the complexity of the territory. More recent feminist scholarship brought me practical inroads and ways of looking at and changing my own world in tangible ways that encouraged my voice to emerge: Fletcher on post-heroic leadership and relational work (1998; 2004) and Gilligan on voice and pleasure (2002, 2011) encouraged me to listen to my own voice and understand its provenance and purpose.
- Narrative inquiry: This work is a journey into the power and possibility of words. I have found inspiration, challenge and experienced change-through-writing, both personally and academically/professionally, through authors such as Turner-Vesselago (2013) on writing from a trance-like abandonment of judgment; Andrews (2014) on narrative imagination; Connelly & Clandinin (1990), Ellis & Bochner (2000) and Spry (2001) on the value of autoethnographic inquiry and writing one's own and other stories into scholarly work; Grey & Sinclair (2006) and Lather (1996) on shedding academic jargon and writing in a different, personal voice; Marshall (2008) on finding the form congruent with my content; Mead (2014) and Morton (2008) on sinking into stories; Rich (1993) as an example of sensuous forays into language and expression; and Richardson (2000) on letting the writing lead me into inquiry. All of the above have influenced the coming into being of Autobiofiction as a viable form of inquiry and scholarly writing.
- Performance studies and research on leadership and art: Steven S. Taylor and Donna Ladkin have made significant inroads into both the artistic sensibilities that can enhance leadership and the useful learning that can be transferred from the arts - such as theatre, music and plastic arts - into leadership practice. (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Bathurst & Ladkin, 2012; Taylor, 2003; Taylor & Statler, 2013) There is a close link in these works to the embodied

qualities of leadership as well as to bringing artful/embodied practices into teaching and learning about leadership (Ladkin, 2013; Taylor & Statler, 2013; Ladkin & Taylor 2010; Sinclair, 2005). While the above authors have made strides in bringing artfulness and the body into leadership theory and leadership development, the field of performance studies covers a broader theoretical territory encompassing “being in the world” in terms of performance. I have found the latter elucidating, particularly in thinking about scholarship in a performative key (Ken & Mary Gergen, 2012), teaching performance and performativity (Stuckey & Wimmer, Eds., 2002), and performativity as a helpful epistemological stance vis a vis the world’s challenges, politics, knowledge and activism (Schechner, 1985 and 2015).

- Ecology and ecopsychology: I have touched upon the ways in which this inquiry finds purpose in continuing the work of thinkers such as Bateson (2000), Bohm (2003), Capra (1997), Hillman (1996) and Wheatley (2006), in the sense of opening up our dialogues and connections with the wider context of the planet as a major motivation for finding more holistic approaches to change and to organizational life. While I would not locate this work firmly within this field of ecology and ecopsychology, it is nevertheless worth mentioning the impetus derived from these authors and their fields of practice.

While the above is a schematic view of the strands that became the weave of this thesis, the coming chapters look into each each strand’s texture, color and contribution to the patterns that emerge.

My own interpretation is that the authors considered in this thesis would likely agree that our world, in dire need of change today, is relying on organizations and individuals focused on problem solving in predominantly linear, rational ways which are blind to the ways in which they preserve the problems at hand and ignore the interests perpetuating them. This inquiry seeks to discover new and forgotten ways for people seeking change to step through the looking glass, imagine, create and take meaningful action towards a more just and sustainable world. I will explore the challenges of such an agenda and explain the methods I have developed as well as the assumptions that get foregrounded when we effect change from a position of increased imaginal, embodied and relational involvement.

The vehicle for this inquiry is language. Although I explore and refer to other ways of knowing, learning and expressing, I do so mainly through words, stories, and even flights of fancy that are grounded in my own (perhaps exceedingly) linguistic approach to life. Imagination and imaginal realms are crucial to the journey I describe here, as is my and others' physical, embodied participation. I advocate for both aspects, the imaginal and the embodied, as core elements in achieving the change that I am seeking. But I work towards and through these theories and practices of imagination and embodiment using words, on the page, telling the story. I trust that future work (and perhaps work that does not require a written thesis as its conclusion) may lead me to discover other means of expression. And while the vehicle is language, and not, let's say, clay or paint, what I have endeavored to mold with my words are a series of ways in which to say the ineffable, see the invisible and change the ungraspable, in service of more conscious lives and more authentic work.

Finding form in the expression of my inquiry has been of particular importance to me. Early on, I found an avenue for expression in writing fictional stories about characters that loosely and freely borrow from different aspects of my life and experience. I got to know my characters, played with them, journeyed and learned with them. I don't believe I was ever truly crafting them: they came forth out of their own emergent need, establishing themselves as an imaginal presence that was not only witnessing but propelling my inquiry into myself, my practice and the theories that stem from these. I have included stories about two main characters, Haven and Keira, throughout the text. In the early days of this inquiry Haven and Keira had a parallel existence, not disconnected from but not explicitly part of the inquiry itself. In Part II, you will witness how they eventually joined the inquiry, breaking in at some points, participating and acquiring a voice within the text. If, as Marshall quotes Flint, identity "is primarily constructed from within, through an individual's deployment of language," (Flint, 1992 in Marshall, 2008: 683) then what we see in Haven and Keira is their development from a described identity in Part I to a participative identity in Part II. This was an unplanned and organic evolution which I have chosen to keep as a record of how such an approach to form can develop.

Marshall uses Woolf's novel *The Waves* as her "aspirational exemplar of the kind of congruence between form, content and thematic contribution." (Marshall, 2008: 683) Inspired by Marshall's article on finding form and by Virginia Woolf herself, I decided to adapt the opening of "A Room of One's Own" (Woolf, 1929) for a speech I was due to give as an introduction to a course on Women

and Leadership. I entitled the speech “A Career of One’s Crafting” and I modified the opening of Woolf’s essay -which was itself originally a speech on “Women and Fiction” given to the women of Girton college in 1928- substituting *fiction* in Woolf’s text for *leadership* and adapting her text to the subject of my speech. I include this speech adaptation in this introduction as a way of setting a tone and inviting voices, influences, cross-currents and perhaps even your own participation as a reader closer to the experience of this thesis.

## A CAREER OF ONE'S CRAFTING

### AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

"But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction--what, has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain."

Virginia Wolff, *A Room of One's Own*.

When you asked me to speak about women and *leadership* I took a walk around the fields and gardens that surround the lush country campus where I am lucky enough to do my work and began to wonder what the words meant. *Women and Leadership*: They might mean simply a few remarks about *Cheryl Sandberg*; a few more about *Hilary Clinton*; a tribute to *Angela Merkel* and a sketch of the life and challenges of *Cleopatra* or *Mary Queen of Scots*; some witticisms if possible about *Oprah Winfrey*; a respectful allusion to *Aung San Suu Kyi*; a reference to *Mrs Thatcher* and one would have done. But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and *leadership* might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and the way they lead, or it might mean women and the organizations that they lead; or it might mean women and the way to lead them, or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on your desks forever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point--a woman must have a community that nurtures her confidence and the freedom to diverge from what is expected if she is to lead; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of *leadership* unsolved.

I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon these two questions--women and *leadership* remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems. But in order to

make some amends I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the *confidence* and the *freedom*. I am going to develop in your presence as fully and freely as I can the train of thought which led me to think this. Perhaps if I lay bare the ideas, the prejudices, that lie behind this statement you will find that they have some bearing upon women and some upon *leadership*. At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial--and any question about sex is that--one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker.

*Leadership* here is likely to contain more truth than fact. Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a *writer*, to tell you the story of the *weeks* that preceded *your* coming here--how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which I have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life.

\*Text by Virginia Woolf with my own italicized substitutions.

At the risk of digressing and distracting the reader with the above playful piece of respectful mimicry, I would like to use this indulgence as a way of introducing what is important to me in this inquiry and in its writing up. First, in Woolf's writing I find an inspiring "concatenation of resonances" and "a kind of mirroring" between form and content which Marshall calls "analogic appropriateness." (Marshall, 2008: 685) Woolf's text is analogically appropriate because the rise and fall of her language, of the characters' expression and especially of the narrator's mesmerizing swell and sway, offers a felt reflection of the ebb and flow of the making of one's identity, the subject of Woolf's novel. In my own reading of Woolf (and I daresay Marshall would concur, even though this is not the focus of her article on form) I find her feminine voice lends a barely audible but sustaining undertone that adds to the seductive rocking of *The Waves*. In Chapter 3, Section 2 of this thesis on "Epistemology and Voice" I explore the complexities of voice, feminism and power in my own and others' writing. For now, by way of introduction, I will merely state my intention throughout my writing (your reading) process to let a natural congruence emerge between what I

have to say and how I say it. This for Marshall is the basis for analogic appropriateness or, as she also calls it, grounded form.

As I mentioned before the distracting speech, my purpose in this work is to convince you that without venturing into our own realms of imaginal, physical and relational knowing, we cannot hope to change ourselves, our organizations or our world in a way that is genuine and lasting. In other words, it is necessary for us to engage in multiple ways of knowing if we are to improve our world. As a way of modeling this claim –and to be analogically appropriate- I have experimented with writing fiction and poetry to inquire into the possibilities of using multiple ways of knowing. I have also engaged in debate with the thinking and writing of others, including peers and scholarly authors and practitioners. A theory emerges, through the practices that I will showcase, that when change is messy and potentially dangerous because its intention is to challenge the power structures of our social and organizational fabric, we must call on less cognitive knowing and doing in order to make progress. Fletcher addresses this very point in the context of gender dynamics in organizations:

These dynamics suggest that it is not enough for organizational theorists to call for new types of leadership or write books about the need for change. Gender- and power-linked aspects of self-identity are highly charged emotional issues. Cognitive attempts to change behavior without a recognition of these deeply embedded, emotional issues are unlikely to succeed because gender- and power-linked images may exert potent—albeit unrecognized—influence on leader and follower behavior, experience, and expectations. (Fletcher, 2004: 654)

My use of imaginal, physical and relational knowing have allowed me to change things in my own life and in an organizational setting without being ejected in the process, which would have truncated the change efforts I have begun. This thesis tracks my own experiences in arriving at this theory of change and fashioning it to my use, both personally and in my work with others. My wish for the reader is that the journey be one of sailing to a desired and enticing destination, making needed stops in safe harbors, weathering the unavoidable storms and learning from the endless sea and its adventures as we go. Our vessel is well stocked and our travelling companions trustworthy and willing. There is no such thing as a safe adventure, and yet I do believe we are holding what we need to face the odds. The ocean beckons.

\*\*\*

First-person research intends, as described by Torbert (1997), to provide insight into the researching subject's participation in the system that contains the focus of inquiry. Part I of this thesis is a first-person inquiry that uses personal writing -including poetry, fiction, autoethnography, journaling and essays- to address personal and systemic change in an oblique, artful manner. I have written about two fictional characters to explore and express some of the currents that were going on in and around my life as I was inquiring. I have followed my two characters, Haven and Keira, through various moments in their lives, giving in to the aesthetic enjoyment of trying to produce compelling, imagery-filled fiction (or, as I will define in the first chapter, what I call *autobiofiction*). Haven and Keira took form and took life in a **semi-fictional format** which I hope the reader will experience as an alternate lens on the author and on the views I express in this text, as well as an aesthetically and emotionally engaging journey.

We get to know Haven and Keira in the early chapters. Once they had arrived on the scene, they inquired with me, first into the bigger context of systemic change and then into more granular, methodological possibilities –such as autoethnography, and writing poetry and fiction. Part I includes an initial reflection on extending this work out into the greater world beyond myself and my interactions with Haven and Keira.

Part II looks at the theory and practice of what happens when I, with all the influence that both Haven and Keira have on this inquiry, apply some of the learning and practices acquired in Part I to my work with others. Second and third-person research (Torbert, 1997) address inquiry that involves the participation of co-researchers and/or research participants in varying degrees. My practice as a Leadership Development professional weaves in and out of second person research as I design and deliver learning experiences in collaboration with team members and other partners and then deliver these programs in an open, dialogue-based approach to corporate participants. Both practices are emergent, by which I mean dynamic and not tied to a fixed outcome. The second person research in this inquiry will focus on my experiences in incorporating Forum Theatre productions into leadership development programs as a means of engaging the participants' imaginations, bodies and relationships to each other in order to effect change.



A key concept that has guided this inquiry is Heron and Reason's (1997) extended epistemology framework. Heron and Reason propose that to be able to fully engage with our world, we know things in four interrelated but different ways which together constitute our "full subjectivity":

A participative worldview, with its notion of reality as subjective-objective, involves an extended epistemology. A knower participates in the known, articulates a world, in at least four interdependent ways: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. These four forms of knowing constitute the manifold of our subjectivity, within which, it seems, we have enormous latitude both in acknowledging its components and in utilizing them in association with, or dissociation from, each other. (Heron & Reason, 1997: 6)

My work and inquiry rely on employing an extended epistemology for myself and in my work with others: I engage in *autobiofiction* in the first-person inquiry and in theatre and improvisation activities in the second/third-person inquiry. Of the four ways of knowing established by Heron & Reason, I pay special attention to the presentational form, which:

... emerges from and is grounded on experiential knowing. It is evident in an intuitive grasp of the significance of our resonance with and imaging of our world, as this grasp is symbolized in graphic, plastic, musical, vocal and verbal art-forms. It clothes our experiential knowing of the world in the metaphors of aesthetic creation, in expressive spatiotemporal forms of imagery. These forms symbolize both our felt attunement with the world and the primary meaning embedded in our enactment of its appearing. (Heron & Reason, 1997: 6)

I use and advocate especially for the presentational form because I have found that I -in my context as woman/mother/daughter/wife/lover/worker- and we -in our organizational systems- tend to rely almost exclusively on experiential and propositional knowing: we tend to do things, being involved in actions (experiential knowing); and we tend to also think about, or conceptualize those actions whether past, present or future (propositional knowing). Heron and Reason suggest that practical knowing -which in their expression is the integrative and most complete form of knowing- relies on

the other three forms: “it fulfills the three prior forms of knowing, brings them to fruition in purposive deeds, and consummates them with its autonomous celebration of excellent accomplishment.” (Heron & Reason, 1997: 10). Such accomplishment relies on the presentational form as much as on the other two forms, and yet it is arguably the most neglected in organizational life and, I would venture to say, in many lives in general.

The work with fiction and theatre explored and described in this inquiry provides evidence that engaging with personal and/or organizational changes through an extended epistemology - especially through the presentational form, which invites us to be creative, physical, playful and daring- opens up the possibility of seeing challenges differently, gaining different perspectives and loosening some of the blockages of our mental models. It allows for our full subjectivity.

Haven and Keira, along with some poetry work, represent the outcome of my presentational work in this inquiry. The facilitation of theatre activities with corporate participants is my presentational invitation to others, to express and work with the contradictions and restrictions of their lives. While Keira is more helpful at getting at the emancipating moments in this work, Haven is more in tune with the participants in development programs. She empathizes and sees herself in them. My hope is that Haven and Keira will continue to show me who and how I need to be to bring myself and others closer to an understanding of the systems that keep us alive and tear us apart simultaneously. Our interactions with authors and thinkers appear throughout the text to show the theoretical ground on which we have written, spoken, poeticized, acted and reflected. Fiction, poetry and theatre are the methods we have found to change with grace, to create without massive destruction, to honor and love as we dismantle.

\*\*\*

When Haven and Keira are both present, we do our best work: Haven listens well to what is going on around us, what the briefing is, what the dangers are; Keira finds shortcuts and breaks rules. Change work happens best when there is enough room on the stage for all three of us, when time and disbelief are suspended and there is a chance for serious play. We are committed to the ongoing work of developing these methods and offering them to others, while acknowledging the risk that they may not always change things. For me, the work of this thesis reminds me to keep bringing

imagination, bodies and relatedness to organizational life. Now, as I embark on a new job in which my role is to help organizations evolve, I choose my actions, my words and my relationships with Haven and Keira close by my side.

Keira, the character, takes pictures and is becoming interested in painting. Haven clings lovingly to her words, knowing she shapes them with enough color and yet often she is wistful when she sees Keira's forays into visual knowing.

*"If we are pontificating about images, imaginations, and imagoes even, we would do well to illustrate, my dear," she said to Haven, early one evening as they moved from shaping their inquiry to pouring a glass of wine. Haven raised her eyes, then rolled them gently, smiling her toothy smile in silent acquiescence.*

*An imago, the two women had recently discovered through a poet friend, is the last stage of a pupa before it becomes a butterfly. Their poet friend, Paul, equipped with the patient eye of the visual artist that he was, had been writing a treatise on "becoming" and shared bits of his writing and photographs with Haven, who shared them with Keira in hopes that she would help her form an opinion of his ethereal images and poetic commentary. Haven resisted the contrast between Paul's voluptuous pictures of flowers and the gritty poems laced with pain and bitter humor.*

*"An Imago is an almost finished version of itself. A preview," Keira ventured. "It's interesting that the term uses the word 'image' to signify a pre-final form, as opposed to a memorialization of what it was, which is what our modern images do: they recollect. Maybe the work we are doing, as Paul the poet suggests, is an imago: a pre-final form of our real life's work."*

*With thanks to Paul, they clinked glasses to this inquiry as an imago, still emerging and coming into being. Haven's brow contracted into a slight crease at the thought that their work would not be final, while Keira's gaze melted into the distance with the promise of new chances.*

**Part I:**  
**Bringing Embodied, Artistic and Imaginal Expression into Change Work**

**Chapter One**  
**Autobiofictional Inquiry: Haven and Keira**

“To solve the split between the academic and the aesthetic, form and content should be congruous. The form mirrors our epistemology.”  
(Marshall, 1997)

Autobiofiction first emerged for me as a way to explore life’s challenging choices and questions from a perspective that is multiple, dynamic, fluid and experimental. As first-person research, that is, research into myself as subject and object of my focus (Torbert, 1997), it allows for playfulness where there is a risk of either solipsism or solemnity. Autobiofiction takes parts of me and circumstances from my past and present and mixes them with other elements and contexts that are only mine through imagination, other stories, and other people and places (real and non-real). Autobiofiction revolves around me, both when it represents me accurately and when it represents exactly not-me. Both modes are revealing to me, in that they either highlight what is/was or what isn’t/wasn’t. Often these stories express an emotional state or stance that introduce some of the theoretical threads that I explore in these pages. I discuss in some more detail the connection between my desires (or agenda) and theory as a public expression of such desires in the introduction to Part II.

As a performance, autobiofiction is also one way -or form- that I have found to bring the academic and the aesthetic closer together. It allows for audience participation where there is a risk of alienating the reader, and for deeper conversations where there is a risk of squeamishness about the intimacy of the human circumstances that arise in the course of this inquiry. I am not suggesting that autobiofiction is the only way to address these issues, nor might it work for everyone or indeed for anyone but me, in quite the same way. What I am saying is that it has provided a way for me to address some of the main concerns I had as I set out to write a doctorate, some of which might be common to other writers and researchers. My concerns were around wanting to satisfy the following wishes:

- To enjoy the craft of writing as I went
- To invite my reader to be taken on a participative journey, sometimes pleasurable, sometimes poignant and sometimes perhaps evoking emotions that I cannot predict, but nevertheless an aesthetic journey
- To address my own life circumstances and choices in a way that is safe for me (and others) and at the same time specific enough to draw the reader into our common human experience
- To discover things about myself and about the world as I inquired through writing

Choosing a semi-fictional approach to telling stories about me (some of them true and some of them imagined) has become a way of keeping me safe: from judgement, from accusation, from harm. I have had to be careful. My stories depict characters who resemble but do not replicate real people in my life. The emotional response that could arise, should these vignettes not be woven into a fictional world, would defeat part of the purpose of this inquiry as a journey to a fuller voice and more fully lived life. I am ambivalent about this recourse. There is an element of hiding in this method, from potential wrath and violence and perhaps also from my own judgement of myself. And yet I remind myself and my reader that there is equally an element of revelation, of showing and attempting to improve without breaking, throwing or slamming anything shut. Autofiction has lent me a space to open rather than close and to reveal beauty even in the ugliest recesses of our human negotiations.

Autofiction reveals stories that walk alongside the other stories (perhaps more true, perhaps not) that we hold. If I consider the strands of feminism that have influenced me most (I develop these in Chapter 3), from the development of an audible voice (Baker Miller, 1976; Fletcher, 1998, 2004; hooks, 1991; Harstock, 1978; Belenky et al., 1986) to the imagining of our cyborg selves (Haraway, 1985) and feminist fiction (Woolf, 1929; Winterson, 1992), it is precisely their reaching for a voice, a story, an identity that walks alongside the now still dominant male voice/story/identity without replacing it or killing it but rather joining it, albeit with a different gait, that inspires me to propose autofiction as a method of expression that has a chance of being heard before it is stifled.

The autofictional section that follows is a selection of stories in which I have followed what delights, intrigues, frightens and awakens a less conscious, less deliberate part of this researcher. It is less intellect and more soul. It follows Haven and Keira through memories, poetic expression, frustration, real life muck and messiness and lofty dreams. I have used these stories to explore my connection to the imaginal potential of aesthetic and artistic expression. In the surrounding sections I make an effort to “make sense” of what happens here and to reflect upon its use.

A good friend told me recently about a probability scenario: if there were enough monkeys typing for long enough, eventually one would type the complete works of Shakespeare. Not one comma out of place. In my story-making, both written and in my head, I am often just typing, putting words together as they come, following the sound and the truthful ring of things, and maybe one day the truth will be sitting there looking at me as I stare in disbelief.

### **The characters**

The emergence of specific characters arose by chance. While I initially did set out to write stories to open up my first-person inquiry, I did not expect two very clear characters to emerge. I should point out that the two characters, while they are both opposed and complementary, should not be matched up with me and not-me, or self and alter-ego. Both have elements of me and both have elements that are fictional. The same is true for other secondary characters.

Haven is a wholesome girl with big teeth who comes from Maine. She has lived in Spain for years, so she is not the country dweller her high rosy cheeks portray. Perhaps that is why she began to lurk around this inquiry, wending her savvy way into autoethnographical experiments, turning them, sometimes, into fiction (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reality exasperates her, despite her love of the breathing planet, of Fritjoff Capra’s prose, despite her suspicion of his self-indulgence (Capra, 1997). She is less simple than she seemed when at first she knocked on the door and joined the work to be done on doctoral matters. She learned quickly... But yes, I now see that she began to subvert things, however subtly, early on. I have trouble nailing her down, but then that may be my own shortcoming.

Keira, on the other hand, is a piece of work, having brazenly sauntered into my inquiry and thereby Haven's too, scoffing at ADOC (Ashridge Doctorate in Organizational Change) altogether. Doctoral work? Not a chance. She is getting on with life, refusing all the while to see that this is serious (isn't it?). We might not get this right, Haven and I, if Keira keeps living life at such a pace, a siren to everyone, including Haven. The fact is, we are all afraid for her. She keeps living and surviving and laughing and breaking down at such a relentless pace. Her wake is full of color and fright. She is both warm and violent.

Haven can tell you that writing about how we have changed through writing stories has led us through discoveries of psychoanalytic theory (Johnson, 1986), theatre (Boal, 1992; Schechner, 2002), autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner 2000, Marshall 2008), feminist theory (hooks, 1991; Butler, 1990; Wolff, 1929; Perkins, 1892; Fletcher, 1998), poetry (Whyte 2002; Bolton, 1999), ecology (Bateson, 1972) and more. When we had to do work we dove into Performance Studies (Schechner, 2002) and what a world of possibilities is there for our intention of creating spaces in which people can learn and flourish! The qualities of such spaces are, for us, centered around embracing deep imagination, promoting embodied involvement (Heron and Reason, 1997; Sinclair, 2005) and engaging with others (Gergen, 2012). These have become the three pillars of this thesis, all of which I will explain in detail throughout the coming chapters.

## The Stories

The vignettes and stories that follow trace my getting to know Haven and Keira as they gradually made their way into the inquiry. At first, they represented a separate track of inquiry, an intense period of getting to know who they were, where they came from, and how they presented themselves. I have included many of their stories here, as they emerged. As a signpost, I will warn the reader that in later chapters Haven and Keira become part of the inquiry, as inquirers, as you will have noticed briefly at the end of the introduction. For now, however, they are characters who are relevant to the inquiry and to me as the inquirer, but they stand separate from the "doing" of the work.

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## KEIRA'S STORIES

### Keira in Dubai

Keira's thin, dark brown body shone in the liquid-hot sun of Dubai's parking lots and garden parties. Most of the time she was inside her cavernous, cold-sealed house, icy restaurants and formaldehyde gymnasiums. Her children wore sweaters to school. But out in the relentless sun, her skin found its natural texture and the sheen of sweat only made her clean, handsome lines more deliberate. She walked slowly from her chauffeur-driven car to the entrance of the shopping mall where she would search for a suitable birthday gift for her son's new friend. She had time to kill before meeting Max, her second-born, in the school's parking lot and taking him to the bowling alley for his friend's party.

"Hey, don't you know most people hide from the sun here?," she was startled out of her sun-soaked reverie, standing on the sidewalk outside the mall, by a somewhat familiar raspy voice.

"Oh!" she laughed, with that deep guttural chuckle that was so quick in her that people found it addictive. "I'm sorry, I didn't see you. You're Sanjay's father, right?"

"Yes, Sanjay the first. Nice to see you again. Are you going in, or just enjoying the parking lot?"

"Right, Sanjay, yes, I am going in and so glad I ran into you. Can you give me a hint on what Sanjay the second might like as a present?"

"Oh god, no idea. Are we doing presents? I'm just here on a last-minute emergency crew to get six extra garden chairs. It seems parents are coming to fetch their little angels but not before we offer them a drink in the garden first."

"Ah. But don't worry about a chair for me, I'm happy standing."

"Look, if you have time, maybe we can do these things together. I know you will pick the right chairs, you have that look about you, and I supposedly will know what my son might want. Can we do this as a team?"



Shopping for chairs they discovered a shared aversion to metal frames and a shared love of travel books when they traversed the book section on their way to check out. Keira admitted to having moved to Dubai on the initial whim of a travel article she read in an airport lounge.

“Of course I then conducted a full-scale research project, but what sparked my interest was that shiny article about the different winds of culture that blow into this place and swirl together.”

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Keira cracking the code

If she were in a cheap new age painting, Keira would be depicted in bright yellows and hot pinks, with a bursting flow of light pouring from her chest, magnetizing her body forwards and up toward the sun. The horizon seemed so close, as she stood on the sand at the edge of the shining sea. Max and Lia played on the sand behind her and she stood there letting the light pour out of her chest until the sun started to dip into the sea and the shadows crept forth. She sighed deeply. Had she been breathing this whole time, while she communed with the clear air and the palpable setting sun? Her bursting chest was full of all kinds of different-colored fears but they were somehow bold, unabashedly present and overt, with names and faces, not the ghoulish reticent terrors that brushed the back of her neck and ducked behind curtains when she caught sight of them. Those haunting traitors were gone, chased off the by the booming light-loving misgivings that moved in when she spoke out loud about moving back to India, rekindling old and even dead friendships, getting a divorce, starting a new path, making her own money and buying a house. Her plans felt as clear and close as the quiet blue horizon. With her feet pressing into the gritty sand, she felt her strong body was ready for a long, cleansing, exhausting swim towards a new version of herself. Before she knew what she was doing, she shed her shorts and shirt and dove into the bracing waves.

Her long swims were a worry for Max and Lia. Especially Max seemed to almost go into a state of arrest, intently building sand castles and making designs in the sand, his trance fueled with deliberate short breaths, until Keira's brown figure would erupt out of the waves a few feet away,

laughing and splashing and returning him to a fully conscious state. His limbs would relax and he would smile broadly, perhaps not even aware of his former state of alarm.

“That was a special swim,” Kiera thought to herself as she moved towards her son, ready to reengage. “Everything seemed possible and good and radical change was my friend.”

It took a few more swims like that one, over almost six months, before Keira, on a starry night sitting in the heat on their stone porch, told Evan that she needed her freedom. She needed her own story back. They had been sitting for some time, after a routinely pleasant family dinner of grilled chicken and quinoa salad. The kids had grown to like her new favorite, quinoa, since she had travelled to Peru, and Evan was always tolerant of her dietary ruts and, loving food almost more than life, he was truly appreciative of her cooking. Keira lovingly cooked the eclectic bunch of dishes she had picked up around the world. He ate them gratefully and fast. She tried to not notice his chewing, which was constant, more so that his talking, which inevitably sprang forth from a full mouth.

The kids sloped off to read in bed. Evan and Keira sat, finishing their wine.

“You look so far away,” he said. “Those eyes... Talk to me.”

“I need... I need to go... somewhere.” The words felt like a grinding, halting gear, making its last gasp of effort to turn before it seizes. “I just need to,” she managed, breathing a little now, and looking up towards his face, not quite making it beyond the mouth and nose area.

She was scared, she admitted, scared of missing him, scared of ruining the children’s lives, her own and perhaps especially his. What a burden to carry! All these people’s lives ruined because she could no longer force her wayward body and mind to remain, buck up, achieve and give at the same time, and quietly bear the muted lovemaking that he so enjoyed. Slow and steady, full of mystical moments for him, for her they only reenacted scenes of duty, mixed with kindness and suppressed aversion.

She felt him slipping away from her like sand that night. After trying so hard for years to keep her close, his soul left her side swiftly and quietly, as she wept and admitted her misery. She marveled

at her own contradiction as she felt herself reaching out for him, opening her own quirky heart and trying to welcome him into it, if only to say goodbye, but he was gone. Heart closed. He suddenly felt nothing for her, this slight, mystery of a woman he had conquered easily and held onto, with the tenacity of a barnacle as she followed many currents and whirlpools around the worlds in her mind and the world outside. He knew in the end he would have to let go and float free and when the moment came it was easy, like releasing a clenched fist. It felt achy but better than the wrenching desperation of trying to hold on.

“I want you to be happy,” she said, through bubbling tears.

“I am,” he answered, knocking back the last sip of wine.

As he got up to go, inside or away to Spain or who knew where, Keira felt the last of her strength go. Even the faint stars closed in and blacked out and her wine glass rolled onto the floor.

Evan did not come back outside before leaving the house that night. Keira stirred from her dead faint as the front door closed. She kept still, her head fuzzy and her heart numb, and heard the car drive off. She stayed in the warm air, in and out of her conscious mind, until dawn.

“Well, I guess now I don’t have to kill him,” she thought. “And that’s ridiculous, and difficult, anyway. God, I really am sick. How will I take care of these children? What kind of mother am I now, passed out on the porch, having driven my mate away after years of not quite love?... Am I a fallen woman?” she mused, tasting her own melodrama, letting it soak her up like a rum baba. More like a salty tear baba, she mused, realizing her eyes were still leaking on and off throughout the hours. She wondered whether she could get herself to move if she tried, but then she didn’t bother trying.

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“Can I help you?”, I hear myself say. I sway, I cock my hips, the jeans feel good. I have slept, run, eaten nuts and seeds and fruit. I am free, I think, cool and beautiful, staving off age—except for a few wrinkles. I am in the sun. It shines for me.

"I don't want your help," says she. "It's all your fault." A fragile pout, about she turns, head on pillow. Nothing to do but wait. I sit on the edge of the bed, knowing I should get up and walk out. Better for us both. But my hands lie limp and heavy in my lap, so useless, that I just stare at them. They have always known what to do. Even in bed with a man I don't love. Now on a bed with a small girl that I do love. I must. I will. I can. But no.

It is so cold in this shade and so warm in that sun. Everything moves with me, then everything stops. Blocks. Blotted out. Walks unhad, words undone, hair untouched, lips... broken. There are two speeds, split, one cannot flow with the other. A mother, slow and secondary; a lover of life, quick and sharp, like a knife.

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Keira always knew, somewhere in her fragile, callous, practical and aching heart, she could be respectable. A true professional: clever, busy enough, solvent, reliable, good. What it felt like now, she kept trying to define. "I feel..." she would say to herself, and then the parrots in the window would catch her eye, her I. "I just feel."

She asked her ex-husband to invite her in for dinner. Awkward silence.

"Ok?" he ventured. "What for?"

"I want to be with you all. Just BE for a while. Can't we do that?" She felt herself faltering, that begging quality in her voice reminding her of the too-good dog they had years ago together. He would sit without whining outside the supermarket and more than once she walked right by him, head down, arms preparing to ache with the weight of the grocery bags, thinking of baths and dinner and her overdrawn bank account and her panicky boss. Dog forgotten until next morning.

"Where's Toby?" asked the smallest child peering over the edge of his high chair where the dog would station itself to receive the debris from his attempts at eating cereal and bananas. The dog would eat anything.

“Honey, where’s the dog?”

“Where IS the dog?”

Half a week on, a concerned citizen finally calls. They want to keep him. Why did you leave him tied up there? Don’t you want him? Yes, for fuck’s sake, who are you anyway, the St. Peter of dogs? Where is the St. Peter for mothers? Thank you, I will come and get him. Thank you so much.

Those were full, physical days and months and years. Pushing, lifting, carrying, bending down because that was all you could do to keep up. There were sweet moments of a handful of children bathed and powder-smelling in soft pastel pajamas with feet. Sweet treats, soft little hands owning all of her, of him, wandering over their faces, hair, inside of mouth, wherever... bodies just extensions of their own. Extended care, of sorts, no delineation between spring and offspring.

“Ok, come. But you explain to the kids what you’re doing here. I always have to field the questions later.”

At least this time he didn’t just tell her to fuck off. She hesitates to sign up for this cloud of negativity.

“I guess I brought this on,” she mutters, hanging up the phone.

Table set, kids waiting. They never used to do that. They had to be ordered to the table. They circle anxiously, forget to hug her properly but she insists. This could be it, she hopes against hope, this could be the evening that makes this all normal, blots up the blood.

“Gourmet burgers!” he announces from the kitchen. “Hi Keir. Sit down, it’s all ready.”

They sat. They clanked their plates and silverware. Haven began conversations and some trailed off, others stuck for a while. There were moments of comfort and just as many of uncertain chewing. Are we tasting burgers or bitterness? she wondered. She felt the weight tugging in her sternum. I did this, she admitted to herself. I am free, but what prison is this? They seem to be stuck in a prison

I erected. Can't they get out? Do I hold the key? But then maybe I am not that important. But maybe I am. Who can tell?

Evan no longer loved her, she realized. He tolerated her, blamed her still no doubt, and could see right through the shiny warm smile to the fearful questions in her eyes. He would not answer them. Why go there? And everyone agreed that these dinners and outings would get better, worth persisting, *you're doing the right thing, both of you. Take care buddy. You'll be fine. Plenty of fish in the sea, and you're still a stud.*

Keira started a dietary cleanse the next day. No gluten or dairy or caffeine or alcohol or sugar or animal protein. Caffeine she missed the most, or maybe just the ritual of it. The cup of tea with milk after morning yoga, preferably back in bed, to check her messages and review the day's schedule, and a rich, creamy mid-morning coffee. Not so bad, in fact, she realized, after a day or two or three. How quickly her stomach aches vanished, that dull pain and malaise that had begun after the land-mine time with Evan started, when moments of harmony and peace were a sure sign of an explosion bound to shake her marrow. A combination of bad diet and bad stress, she diagnosed, sometimes even boring herself with these machinations but all in the attempt to live, to live well, to be true, to find and feed that girl that was once Keira. The original spirit rather than the surviving flesh.

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Keira once imagined that she would leave her marriage.

"I had to leave my family," she tells her mother, forcing herself to talk, trying to understand that there is nothing left to lose."

"You left your husband. Which is a shame," her mother says slowly, looking somewhat put out, like she was thinking about the knot in her stomach and whose fault it might be that it was there. "But your children are still yours. You will still see them, live with them, take care of them."

"Maybe," Keira mutters. "If they let me. I don't want to be dramatic, but the way this all happened... I know they blame me. Evan set it up that way, lashing out, making the evidence worse than it was,

never giving me a chance to coexist in a shared world with him and the kids and my evil boyfriend, if necessary. I mean, obviously we needed to split romantically and maybe even logistically, but he won't let us live in the same world. Not enough room in the world for both my lives. They are pitted against each other."

"Why do you think that?" the deflated mother asks. "What have you tried?"

"Look, I tried breaking up with the evil one several times. I told him I could not hurt the people I love for the sake of his love. I said I was sorry. I broke his heart. And I was fine. Sad and weepy for a thing gone by, but ok. And then I would go back. I would fall into his arms and kiss him after a long day of alternating frigidness and warmth between us, never knowing what to turn on or off, always looking for the other's presence. We are too close. It didn't work to turn away because we seek each other's company, sense of humor, intellect, affection. We are addicted."

"Then why did you resist it so much? Why did you drag your marriage out to the point of exhaustion? ... And bad health?" She wondered what it was that most offended her mother about all this.

"Who knows?" looking out over the flat grey flickering lake. "I just don't know."

"I think you do. You must."

"I really don't. Please let me go."

"Go! By all means. I'll cook some chicken and meet you later with the kids. They will be glad to see you."

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Assuming she was lost, never to be retrieved, systematically pulled apart and put back together as something else, Keira had begun to hear the simple melodies, starting from scratch, like songs from a kindergarten class. Everything could be reduced: a ring tone back to a single sound, a down and back run –no loop-, a meal of brown rice, piano music on the old CD player, white curtains, short

days at work marked by children's needs instead of shiny, emergent chances to perform, small true sentences.



## HAVEN'S STORIES

### Remembering Mary

Mary Evanson, mother of five and one of the pillars of the community, turned one evening to the sailing club commodore and remarked: "She's so helpful!" with love in her voice. Haven was seventeen. It was her second summer running the little sailing club and she loved the work, despite the sometimes lengthy hours and menial tasks such as cleaning the bathrooms, cleaning up after Saturday tea and scooping the depositions of members' dogs off the front lawn, not to mention mowing it once every week or two with an old, heavy, hand-pushed mower.

Haven often thought now about the corrugated texture and rich, sun-soaked colors of those summers, that purity of intention and consciousness that she could remember feeling on a sparkling morning in Maine, assembling her young, adoring sailing students. She knew then how much they held her in an immovable place of glory and she marveled at it now, wondering what it was that made her magnetically compelled to give her whole heart to those kids who were mostly afraid of the cold harsh water and wind but wanted to be brave in front of her. The boys especially dreamt of being saved by her in some steely-gray nautical disaster. The beating hearts of it all! Kids and adults alike were taken in by the love she lathered all over the community in that classic, perfect specimen of a Maine clubhouse, with its wooden floors and wrap-around porch, robust painted rocking chairs lined up facing the still harbor. She diligently rearranged the rockers every morning and afternoon so that anyone who wandered down from their cottage to the club house found a Norman Rockwell scene ready to step into. They all loved her big white teeth but they didn't say so, they just smiled at her a lot and she mirrored their simian expression of pleasure obligingly, broadly, often, and this kept her heart open but almost never exposed.

Today, this week, much later in life and mired in what she truly hoped would be the most clouded epoch of her good existence, she watched herself smiling and laughing at jokes and absurd setbacks in her office setting. Her heart was shredded by doubt, self-doubt, marital exhaustion, sentimental confusion, abhorrence and lack of sleep. That heart had learned so well to empathize and mirror others that it was drawn to laughter and masked the shriveled bit of her soul.

In her car, alone, listening to the lonely call of Natalie Merchant's pleas, Haven thought about changing her life, her job, her marriage, her focus. There was such sadness in the losing, in the limits, in the shutting down of one operation in favor of another. Like the result of a productivity analysis in a factory. Let go to let come.

### Sweet Dreams

There were nights when Haven would wake at three or four in the morning with the distinct feeling that her insides were rotting. It even smelled, from the inside, like rotting animal out in a field by a river, which one hopes to only smell and smell briefly and not have to see or name or touch. But in her sleeplessness, the embodied smell stuck to everything and she could not keep walking through the field. Sometimes she would sit in that smell, try to identify it, let it be there and get to know her body. She tried to see its face, thinking it might be similar to the face of nightmares about her children in grave danger, but it would not let her know it. It just hovered and stank. Somehow, most times, sleep would find her again and she would wake with only a faint tinge of it wrapped around her heart. If she went out to the living room -loving the solitude- to follow a yoga video, she could make it go away with the steady breathing. It would be back again though, as long as she was alone and the family slept. Hot tea also scared it off a bit but it generally lingered all day, until love, pressing work or alcohol could dissipate it.

Haven rarely saw her girlfriends and when she did, she was left limp by the words that touched nothing in her soul. The talk about schools and teachers and stories about husbands who were whiny but not mean enough to fill the meaning of the words and plop a real frustration on the table. The whole group muddled along somehow. She was proudest of the lawyer-turned-painter who had changed her whole existence for art, but talked to her the least. How did she really feel about the remaining guy and three children and healthy family economy she kept? Did it feel like shoes that don't fit, or was painting just another way of getting something done?

In the summer she had reunions with old friends who might have helped, who knew her from birth but who only saw her life in happy summer vignettes. They could see her earth from a satellite view

perhaps, but then some of these women were mean. They guarded their relationships like they did their husbands and their boats, carefully sanded and varnished, proud of the perfect waterlines that smiled at their own reflections in the calm and pretty harbor. She knew they shared opinions with each other but her own intimacies were never quite appropriate. They didn't want to know about her life really. She was invited to most of their parties, but not to their kitchen tables and she never quite knew why. But these were the problems of August, when the rest of world recedes and sun and salt and white snappy wine season the days. Even still, there were so many joys in her long summers that she knew she could not focus on the pain for long. And yet, sometimes in February or March, those disappointments and social puzzlements could find her and make her wonder what she had done, why she wasn't as crisp as those snow-white ladies. In her heart she suspected it was just money, but that seemed like such a crass solution. Surely there must be one tinge of something else, some essence, some chink of hope which, even if she lacked it, was a proper human reason for her exclusion.

"What's it like to be so fucking riddled with insecurities?" her sister asked one afternoon after playing tennis in a misty drizzle. "You tell me," she thought, but replied instead: "Keeps me from boredom." She dragged her arm down over her damp face. "Drink?" she asked, with wide unchallenging eyes.

Her sister Lila, ten years younger and a taller, darker version of herself, had so many "issues" she had resorted to writing a violent, smutty novel to externalize everything from abortions to made-up food allergies. Something of a migrant knowledge worker, Lila claimed she could not afford therapy nor did she really believe in it. Barbara, their mother, stood like the middle column of an antique scale, holding up these daughters, or so she thought, trying her best to give each one what she needed: space and advice and logistical help to Haven; a combination of tough and tender love and lots of money to Lila. Haven had a similar relationship with work and vocation as she did with the concept of her mother: passionate and heartfelt but guarded, using thick armor to guard her from the heat.

## Octane Drive

Driving to work this brilliant, high octane morning, Haven felt a magnetic attraction to the idea of perfection. Living a good life, she pondered, was harder than one might think. Still, why was she so far off the mark? How hard did it seem, in the clear April air, to get things right, know the direction, make decisions, stick to them and feel the full-breath satisfaction of a job well done? Her thoughts were clear, not clouded like on the recent more melancholy wet spring days, but her mind was rushing, spinning like a wheel trying to get traction. She wondered whether the sense of attainable clarity was coming from Vivaldi's Gloria or whether it was the nearness of clarity that had led her to that choice on her iPod. Too many thoughts, she told herself, but really what is wrong with writing them all down, making a plan, charting a course, getting rid of the mess? A little voice whispered that life is messy.

"In fact," the voice murmured shyly, "messy can be beautiful. Remember, Haven? Soft edges and not knowing are what you are getting to appreciate in yourself. What's gotten into you this morning?"

"It's definitely the Vivaldi," she answered out loud, despite a brand new sore throat. "Sexy voice," she added and came around the corner of the highway at the edge of the city where every day she passed the giant, monolith cement factory, densely brown and irreparable-looking, before she could imbibe the sudden, ineluctable view of the mountains beyond the urban sprawl. She loved this bursting view, especially as that was where she was headed every day, to her workplace, fortunately nestled at the foot of those hills.

Vivaldi charged forth with unstoppable mojo, the strings goading the voices and then vice versa, working each other up into a frenzy of major harmony. Haven felt in that moment that she could do it all: she could make decision (the right ones!), be organized, tell her heart where to put its energies, move house, make summer plans for all her children and save money, all the while becoming more and more excellent in her professional endeavors. One thing would feed on the other. She would never again avoid preparing a teaching session to perfection. How hard can that be?

“I will be perfectly prepared,” she told herself. “And then before I walk into the house in the evening I will breathe, shake off the determination, the executive excellence, the sharp mind and tongue, and embrace the soft chaos of dishes, hungry cat, small arms around my waist and that strange smell of the flat’s entryway.” She never did know whether to attribute it to the shoes, the cat, lingering food, or just slightly shabby cleaning habits.

“But there I go,” she realized. “I have barely entered the door and I have shed nothing. I notice the smell, judge it to be ‘improvable’ and there is my first value judgment of the evening.”

The colleagues in her self-leadership program had been getting on her back about value judgments made in class. This course, which she taught together with half a dozen professional coaches and another professor, was heavily imbued with a holier-than-thou commitment to reaching for higher truth, respecting each person’s path, not teaching but offering guidance and never ever passing judgment on anything. A highly emotional week had led her to pronounce a few thoughts that teetered on the edge of opinion and her well-meaning advisors “expected more from her.” She tried to dismiss their concern by rising above the dogma of this secular religion, but the tears leaked out anyway as she sat in the sun with her coffee, thinking things over, wondering why she could not just breakthrough to delivering flawless sessions. She thought she should be able to offer her whole heart with utter vulnerability and at the same time do it with aplomb and even showmanship. Like a scene from West Side Story where the music tugged at her heart and the performance was so well executed she would forget she was a spectator and this was not her life.

“It’s show business,” her closest colleague explained, compassionate but needing her to move on. These were busy days and the show had to go on. “I’m sorry, it’s just never going to be as important for it to be authentic as it is for it to be good. You have to embellish and improve the stories. Fuck the truth.”

He was a perfect antidote to the apostolic coaches. Irreverent, impetuous and with a fierce belief in both her and their collective ability to run courses that people would adore, he seemed to think this phase of teaching self-leadership in little bursts, which for Haven was still a challenge – a “stretch” as they say – was a stepping stone towards true greatness for them both. A feather in his (and maybe their) cap, an added capability, on the way to a breakthrough. She believed he would get there, but

she knew she would be watching and supporting. Not there with him. She suspected he knew this somewhere in his highly sensing small frame too.

#### Whereabouts

“Where am I?”, she asked herself, as she woke aching at 3 a.m. drenched in sweat and with a familiar black hole of terror sucking at her entrails. She had been falling like a stone, just as hard and cold, through water to the bottom of a bottomless well. The vertigo persisted poignantly even though she was awake, sitting in her bed, the slight figure of her daughter asleep next to her. The long blonde hair flung randomly in all directions and her calm breathing soothed Haven a bit as she tried to connect the dream to some cause. Why had she fallen down a well?

“I am here,” she concluded, after a sip of water and another pleading look at her child’s comfort, “at home, not alone, with my sleeping children, and daylight will come soon. I hope I can get back to sleep.” She knew that the mere act of wishing for sleep was like a scarecrow to her desired slumber. Yet somehow, the heaviness inside her pulled her back, not nearly to the dream of the well, but to its unconscious edges. Sleep resumed.

Haven’s question stayed with her through her drive to schools and work the next morning: where am I? She remembered the ‘wherabouts’ rule at boarding school. Such a grave one to break, yet she who was not at all a rule-breaker, broke it all the time. It was so easy. “Now I am here, and here is fluid. It is limbo. It is quantum”, she thought.

#### One Good Day

Haven’s boy, grown up past the old door jambs, was acting tiny again, fiddling with a phone and distracting littler people from the task of ingesting their dinner. Out at a restaurant this was unseemly yet the soft complicity among these clean-lined puppies was good to the eyes and the ears. One had to let it go sometimes. “Can we go outside?” they asked, tired of the adultish gabbing. “And can I have some of your beer?” added the bigger broader one. Haven just smiled and nodded, realizing how thick the summer evening air could be, thick with love and blissfully unaware of the

ticking clock or the bill to be paid. "Of course," she said, but he had already swallowed a big gulp and was following the others out into the yellow light of the street lamp. She watched them wistfully, then turned her attention back to the table, to the creatures' father telling stories and the friends nodding and breathing together. Another day should be this good, alive, eating, planning, dreaming, finding friends at a pub.

#### Talking with Trevor

"Have you talked about divorce?" Trevor, her eldest, asked. His bare chest looked so unprotected, its thin layer of skin just barely covering the strong, swelling frame of his bones. So little between the heart inside and all the sharp things in the world. It reminded Haven of how delicately she had to pick at the frail bones of the woodcock her father cooked, after triumphantly shooting them out of the sky. One could barely hold the little bones well enough to eat them.

"Well," she hesitated. Should she evade or persist in her awful pact with the truth? "Yes," she admitted, "though not too seriously."

"Don't do it," he said, neither looking up nor down.

"Ok." Silence, getting longer, no one breathing. Then: "Let's get some breakfast."

The rest of the day was diamond-sunny, the mountain clarity mocking the collective haze in which they set off for a day of skiing. The sun made Haven squint and everything felt muted, packed in cotton, so that the normal reverberations of life got cancelled out. Crisp silence and polite responses from her subdued pack of kids made her uneasy and eager to get them off and onto the mountain.

"The day is perfect," she ventured. "I am going for a run and will join you at two for a picnic. They shuffled off with their gear.

Down in the valley the sun warmed her face and the bending brown grass that rippled in the fields. Such a soft winter landscape. The hills looked like propped up pillows with stuffed animals nestled

below, around the proud snowy peaks. She looked up to where she imagined them regaining normality as they raked up and down the lifts and swooped down the slopes on graceful limbs.

She set off running along the side of a reservoir with hat, gloves and layered jackets. Her breathing was rhythmic and familiar. Her body was stiff and reticent from lack of sleep but her need to stifle the encroaching despair kept her moving. After two kilometers, she fell into a loose-limbed pace. No rush, she thought. Life lies ahead.

#### A House

Haven's heart went out to a smallish grey farmhouse built in 1875. The rooms and spaces reminded her of Ethan and Zena Fromme's house. The light and picture windows invited her thoughts to drift up and out with the bald eagle she followed in his dominion of the cove they shared.

#### Silent

All weekend she wanted to have a talk, let some things out, see where the conversation might lead, and tell him about her "fine instinct", the hiding, the solitude. She couldn't quite bring herself to speak. Not now, there are veggies to chop and cook. And now it's dinner time. And now you are finally peaceful. And now we are in bed and if I ruin it you will get up and I will no longer sleep well. "So selfish," she hears his voice in her head.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Big Theory: A Promise of Interconnectedness**

The universe seems both broader and like a small and fragile thing after reading holistic theories such as systems thinking (Bohm, 2003), Gaia theory (Capra, 1997), living earth (Abram, 1997), even Carlos Castaneda's (1968) becoming one with the networks behind the networks we perceive; communicating with the animal and spiritual worlds. These ideas draw me out of myself, away from the particular and connect my thinking and writing to a larger whole. As I read Castaneda, Abram and Capra last summer, I was drawn to the life I could see, feel, hear and smell in the little cove I inhabit for a month every year in Maine. I began to see the rivulets at low tide as the veins of the earth and the rock where I sat as a special vantage point from which I could listen to the life of the planet. A stethoscope point, as I have come to think of it: a point from which I can hear and understand the beating of our collective hearts, together with the planet and all the intricate designs we proffer forth. I don't think I have many stethoscope moments in cities or malls or theme parks. The tidal mudflat in Maine, or the leafy wet woods around Ashridge in the English countryside are points of vulnerability, from which you can sense the pulsing earth, remote, protected, unencumbered by the mass of human ambition.

Another stethoscope point occurred for me in a workshop I led on "Writing the Soul" with two other colleagues in my doctoral program. As I described to my colleagues the way in which I was using fiction to tap into my own presentational knowing, I saw the connection between my imaginal/autobiofictional writing and the improvisational theatre work with corporate participants, which you will read about in more depth in Part II. Both practices are examples of my emerging theory of change: that we need to access the imaginal, the unreachable, the underlying and, as I will suggest, the unconscious, in ourselves and in our communities to access genuine and lasting change.

This chapter considers the "big rocks" of theory that have informed my inquiry. Theorizing, as Chris Grey (2013) points out, is itself an activity that emerges from a need or desire for change, either because the present situation is not good and there is a need to make things better or because the present situation is notably good and we would like to make other things as good as this one, about which we are theorizing. I will elaborate on the "agenda" -or intention- of change in the introduction to Part II. For now, I would just like to remain with the notion that change requires us to imagine

something, to allow ourselves to be creative and open. In this chapter, I will explore how we can aspire to making positive and sustainable change happen by spending time in the realms of creative expression, the unconscious, and the symbolic.

I will focus mainly on the use of the presentational form (Heron & Reason, 1997) in this inquiry, as I will address the notion that certainly I have tended to overlook presentational knowledge both in my personal development and in my work within organizational life. This thesis charts a reconnection with presentational knowing and both advocates and illustrates its role in completing our collective and individual epistemologies. The result I am reaching for is to clear a path towards a participative worldview (Heron & Reason, 1997) at a time when fragmentation and partial views of organizations as small as families and as large as the global community threaten to descend into conflict or disintegration.

The work of “Move, Make, Imagine” draws on various ways of seeing through what we perceive to be reality. The scholarly work that has influenced me is in some way dedicated to seeing through perceived reality in order to offer alternative possibilities. What I have done differently here is to reverse the order: I play with alternative possibilities of reality in order to see through our perception of what is. It is an act of shaking free momentarily of our acquired structures of perception, a blurring of vision that might render a clearer picture.

The writing up of this inquiry takes the reader through various encounters with schools of thought, theories and methods (in addition to my own experiments or “field work”) which include ecology, psychology, narrative expression, performance studies, post-modernism, feminism and Action Research theory. These influences have collectively given shape to an approach to positive change that is based on *playful reconstruction of reality* within a *communicative space*. I will frame these two concepts in the following pages, drawing on a few of its influencers. The remaining strands of thought listed above will appear throughout the chapters that follow.

## 2.1 Journey into the Cosmos

“Without the oxygenating breath of the forests, without the clutch of gravity and the tumbled magic of river rapids, we have no distance from our technologies, no way of assessing their limitations, no way to keep ourselves from turning into them. We need to know the textures, the rhythms and tastes of the bodily world, and to distinguish readily between such tastes and those of our own invention. Direct sensuous reality, in all its more-than-human mystery, remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world now inundated with electronically-generated vistas and engineered pleasures; only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us.” (Abram, 1997: x)

Magic, then, in its perhaps most primordial sense, is the experience of existing in a world made up of multiple intelligences, the intuition that every form one perceives—from the swallow swooping overhead to the fly on a blade of grass, and indeed the blade of grass itself—is an experiencing form, an entity with its own predilections and sensations, albeit sensations that are very different from our own. (Abram, 1997: 10)

The journey into the cosmos, into expansive, holistic thinking—or “Big Theory” as I have thought of it—points to a path of change that takes into account that what we construct and reconstruct comes from an imaginal state, a state that transcends what -and how- we consciously know about our world.

In this chapter on Big Theory, I describe the influences that have moved me from working with imagination and creativity at a surface level (addressing ‘how to’ questions on a “managerialist” plane, as Grey might classify it, in which my purpose was more aligned with “getting people to work more creatively in order to maximize profit”) (Grey, 2013) to looking underneath, as if seeking shelter from the wind, to include the unconscious and imaginal as underlying sources and foundations for bringing about change. I will examine the connection that has started to emerge from my reading and my experience between the unconscious/imaginal realm and a systemic or holistic world view.

When I have considered the contradictions and challenges that I face in my own development (via an intentionally oblique, fictional approach) as well as those experienced by people in organizations,

I have been able to discern underlying systems that don't support -or that undermine- the changes or shifts we are trying to make. The nature of such systems is that they are largely invisible to us (Senge, 1995). They exist in the form of assumptions, established business models, institutions such as corporate structures or family structures that are so much part of the ground on which our challenges are built, that we take them for granted. These systems, which can often be the underlying obstacles to making the world better, bear a resemblance to the unconscious such as it is described and studied in the field of psychology. The organizational thinkers whose work I refer to in this chapter point to a breakdown in our institutions, in our values and in our connection to the planet and to each other. What emerges is the suggestion that the unconscious is to creative and positive personal development what ecology and psychology are to organizational sustainability and change (and perhaps organizational and societal health). Peter Senge (1995) highlights the isolationist view that most managers and business owners have of the value chains to which they belong. It is a lack of a systemic understanding of this chain that leads to all manner of mistakes, emotional reactions to adversity and poor learning. Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer (2013) make an urgent call for a new level of awareness in those who manage our organizations and institutions. Writers such as Abram (1997) and Capra (1997) worked to show the benefits of considering a broader and deeper view of our lives, our work and our actions, connecting the world of business and "operating in the world" with some of the emerging work at the time in physics, cybernetics and systems theory.

## 2.2 Journey into the Psyche

The organization theorists referenced above suggest that we are experiencing a societal lack of deep connection to ourselves and to our surroundings. Research theory, such as Romanyshin's (2013), suggests that the winding path of my inquiry was following a thread back to a need in my own existence for connection to myself and to a surrounding context. Jung was leading me to claim responsibility for my dreams, my unconscious, my desires and some of the "societally less acceptable" ways in which these manifest themselves. Johnson (1985) was giving me tools to access deeper levels of myself such as the dream work that I describe in Chapter 3, Section 4. James Hillman (1995) writes about a connection between the organizational and institutional crises we face and the kinds of crises we might experience as individuals simply trying to live in the world and do the best we can. The confluence of these two fields -organization theory and psychology- suggested to me that we are facing a neurosis, as a society, that stems from a breakdown in our awareness, in our connection to our deep selves, to each other and to our planet.

If common ground exists in the kinds of deep challenges we face in our organizations and in those we face in our post-heroic selves (Mead, 2014), what can we learn from systems thinking and from deep psychology, each of which studies the underlying patterns of our collective and individual dynamics? What can we harvest from these common grounds for personal and organizational development? And how am I/could I be dwelling in such territory for my own personal development work and for my work with business executives?

Jung believed that every mortal has an individual role to play in this evolution. For just as our collective human capacity for consciousness evolved out of the unconscious psyche, so it does in each individual. Each of us must, in an individual lifetime, recapitulate the evolution of the human race, and each of us must be an individual container in which the evolution of consciousness is carried forward. (Johnson, 1986: 7)

In his work on dreams and the unconscious, Johnson points out the disconnection between our conscious and our unconscious awareness of ourselves and of the world. (Johnson, 1986) Drawing on Jung, Johnson makes a case for the positive effects of working with our dreams and our unconscious to achieve a process of "individuation." Individuation, as Johnson uses the term, is not

a process of separation from the rest of the world, but a journey inward in which we discover our plural inner beings and bring them together to achieve an integrated state: "Individuation is not only becoming conscious of these inner energy systems, it is also bringing relatedness and unity among them." (Johnson, 1986: 49)

Doing our own "inner work", connecting with our dreams and our unconscious can make us whole, that is, fully present to our existence in the world. It connects us, as the term "psychology" denotes ("logos" or the study of, and the "psyche" or soul), to our soul, that so-far un-locatable, undefinable and deepest part of our being. In Chapter 3, where I delve into how various theories and methods have influenced and breathed into this inquiry, I will show how, following Johnson's method, I have used inner work to acknowledge my soul and my humanity with greater awareness. I will also discuss how this is affecting my work with others.

What happens when we live disconnected from the vast territory of our unconscious? When the ego charges forth, avoiding encounters with doubt, shadows, complexity or fear? Johnson notes that it is our inexplicable inner conflicts, our discomfort or neuroses that make us aware that the unconscious is affecting us, calling to us, trying to make itself heard. The unconscious becomes apparent when it invades our conscious behavior or state of being. Jung and Freud were only able to study the unconscious through "patients in whom the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious levels had broken down." (Johnson, 1986: 5) Thus it has been only through the absence or negation of the unconscious that we, as humans, have become aware of its presence. The unconscious is our silent and invisible partner when we can acknowledge its absent presence; and a pathologically present absence when suppressed. The ego walks a precarious line when disconnected from the unconscious, as neurosis becomes more insistent with every attempt to stave it off.

Jung believed that each of us provides a full "microcosm in which the universal process actualizes itself." (Jung in Johnson, 1986) We each represent the whole of the collective system, the collective unconscious replicated myriad times in each of us, and not just a part of the greater whole. Thus, we as humans are neither a fragment, nor must we be fragmented within ourselves. Margaret Wheatley develops this idea, discussing how each of us contains the whole of the universe in our

DNA: we are part of a greater system and we are also the system, each of us, a whole entity within a greater whole. (Wheatley, 2006)

James Hillman (1995) took issue with the fact that psychology, in order to define its scope, has traditionally limited its focus to the disconnected individual. All of logos (or science) in some way suffers from such delimitations: biology limits itself to the study of what is apparently a living organism, excluding, for example, the study of rocks, minerals or air, which is the realm of geology. But the borders between the two, and between any two disciplines can seem arbitrary, a practical fragmentation for the sake of reducing complexity: could not the evolution of the earth, its living and changing strata and mineral elements, be considered living? These limits seem as arbitrary as early psychology's insistence that animals had no consciousness at all and no capacity to feel. Jung dangled a future invitation, suggesting that "God and all of creation labored through time to bring conscious awareness into the universe, and that it is the role of human beings to carry that evolution forward." (Johnson, 1986: 6) While Jung seemed happy to leave the completion of this evolution to future generations, Hillman takes Jung's invitation more urgently, seeing its resolution as overdue and a present imperative: "we cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet." (Hillman, 1995)

Our approach to psychology, in other words, need not be limited to our (assumed) subjectivity, to the limit between "me" and the rest of the universe. If our subjectivity is not reconciled with our unconscious and the collective unconscious of the universe, we are only studying and curing fragments, and thus contributing to the very fragmentation which is the origin of our personal and universal neuroses. This is how, for Hillman, "psychology merges willy-nilly with ecology." (Hillman, 1996)

There is nothing new about the contemplation of "me" in the greater cosmos. The mystery of our small and fleeting existence has long been the subject of philosophical, religious, scientific and artistic expression and debate, from antiquity to current pop culture. What is useful to me and, as I argue in Part II, to the organizational world, is the notion that we can incorporate a psychology that is integrated with ecology into our practical approaches to development. We can help people and organizations tap into the collective unconscious that Jung began to point out and that has its roots in the underlying structures of our existence on earth (therefore ecological roots). Hillman, Johnson, Romanyshyn, Campbell, and others in the fields of psychology, ecology, mythology, education and

more have taken up our human need for connection to the planet, to soul, to the unconscious and to our collective unconscious and worked to incorporate these ideas into the general discussion on human development. Since they have already done so, I will not dwell on the reasons for which it is important for us to be aware of some “bigger theory” as we try to make sense of organizations and life. Instead I will focus on how conducting this inquiry in the context of the eco-psychological thinking reviewed in this chapter has led me to connect with imaginal and symbolic realms both at a personal level and in my work with others.

It is worth noting that the field of “Organizational Psychology” (also called Industrial and Organizational Psychology”) is also not the focus of this work. While valid work has been done, starting with the Hawthorne Studies which researched the effect on productivity of improving working conditions (namely intensity of lighting) to current research on happiness, productivity, and motivation, the scope of this inquiry is less concerned with organizational results than with people’s relationships to personal and collective change. It is about adapting to and/or changing the conditions that allow us to flourish or prevent us from doing so. This researcher’s intention for any systemic or organizational changes that might ensue from this work is that they be placed at the service of those involved rather than at the service of organizational productivity.

Our psychological connection to ecological awareness and participation can be made possible in practical terms through our epistemological connection with creative, imaginal practices. Chris Seeley (2008) worked to discover and disseminate the concept of “artful organizations” by connecting artful practice, reflection and literature with the aim of developing more sustainable and holistic organizations. I will come back to Seeley’s work in more depth both in my exploration of poetry in Chapter 3—and in Chapter 6 on improvisational theatre—where I will show how tapping into the unconscious and the imaginal in development work can give individuals and groups the ability to become aware of the underlying currents of our challenges in order to approach change with a deeper participation of our whole selves.

*Haven sat in the meditation cabin in the woods above the house in Maine where she grew up, trying to think clear thoughts. “Meditation is not emptying the mind, like some people say,” she remembered her yoga teacher saying. “It is observing your thoughts as they come and go, without being gripped by them.”*



*"Easier said than done," she mumbled to the bubbling stream below. She felt part of her mind complying with her wish to meditate, yet still a nagging urge to clean the little cabin made her think of spiders.*

*And then her breathing settled and she saw a man open the cabin door and curl his tall frame forward to come in and sit beside her. She had never seen this man before. He was dressed in white, had a large frame, white hair, a quiet and patient demeanor, and no specific features except these. Haven saw him only out of the corner of her eye as he sat next to her on the bench. He wanted her to talk about her life.*

*"My children," she began, "have been lucky enough to attend a school that is set up especially to offer as much training in music and dance as can possibly be tolerated by the ministry of education," she related in a steady, deliberate voice. "Every year, I attend the few open classes they offer so that parents can glimpse their children's world. Ever since the first time I attended these classes, almost a decade ago, I was struck by the poise and discipline that was apparent in these very young children from the moment their classes began. Boys and girls filed in, perfectly dressed and prepared, the girls with their hair neatly arranged in buns. Without any chit-chat or disorder, they take their places in the class, respectfully bow to the teacher and the piano player, and begin their warm-up routine with intent yet relaxed focus. Their bodies and minds are one, doing the work, breathing, moving, feeling. They are present: to their physical training, to their mental connection, to their spiritual being.*

*"Every time I leave one of the open classes, particularly classical ballet first thing in the morning, I have the same feeling: if we could all start our day like this, connected to the ground, to our breath, to our collective movement and position in the room, to the ethereal live piano music and to the pursuit of something aesthetic, we could have a different day and a different world."*

*The tall man in white nodded. Haven did not remember him leaving, but she was soon alone again. The gurgling of the stream seemed louder now and a damp chill hovered.*

### 2.3 An archaeological journey

In his book *Homo Deus*, Harari (2015) narrates a history of humankind that holds our ability to create and believe in stories as the single attribute that differentiates us from all other species. The “intersubjective belief” is, in Harari’s view, the secret of human domination over all other forms of life on our planet, and indeed -perhaps to our eventual demise- over the planet itself: because we are able to imagine and express stories about things that don’t actually exist (such as gods, money, countries or companies) we are able to organize massive numbers of people around far-reaching ideas and ideals that we are willing and eager to live and die for:

Sapiens rule the world because only they can weave an intersubjective web of meaning: a web of laws, forces, entities and places that exist purely in their common imagination. This web allows humans alone to organize crusades, socialist revolutions and human rights movements. (Harari, 2015: 149)

As Harari points out, it is only because enough of us agree that certain printed notes have a value which can be exchanged for goods and services that we can use money confidently and constantly over time, saving, spending, lending, investing, etc. Concepts such as nations, institutions and organizations follow the same principle: it is only because enough people (or some people with the right intersubjectively agreed-upon authority) decide where the borders of countries lie or what rules are needed to constitute a company or a school or a family that these entities have effects on the real lives of people. Our entire organized world relies on such intersubjective beliefs, or commonly accepted stories.

Harari makes the case that, because stories are central to our humanity, we would do well to promote and emphasize the humanities as a discipline alongside the hard sciences rather than privilege the latter as sciences of “truth.” Even supposedly objective truths, Harari observes, are also products of what we believe to be true or important because of previously held intersubjective beliefs:

The humanities, in contrast [to the life sciences], emphasize the crucial importance of intersubjective entities, which cannot be reduced to hormones and neurons. To think historically means to ascribe real power to the contents of our imaginary stories.

(...)

Hence if we want to understand our future, cracking genomes and crunching numbers is hardly enough. We must also decipher the fictions that give meaning to the world. (Harari, 2015: 151)

One of the strands of this inquiry is an attempt to also decipher the fictions that, for one reason or another, are not making it into the meaning-making headlines. I try to foreground the multiple and alternative fictions that give a more complete meaning to our world. And we must understand whence the dominant fictions emerge and establish their supremacy. It is a battle of stories, on some level.

In her introduction to Michel Foucault, Lisa Downing (2008) points to the French philosopher's conflicted and shifting treatment of the self and subjectivity. Foucault's thinking offers a compelling backdrop for this inquiry, most especially in terms of subjectivity/the self, the humanities and the concept of truth, and relationships of power. The following passage from Downing's text touches on the humanities, as discussed in relation to Harari's work above, positing the self as a creative opportunity and fiction as a step towards reinvention:

We have seen that what is at stake for Foucault in thinking about literature is, again, the question of the self: the self that is historically located; that is not fixed; that reinvents itself as it disappears from focus. The self that is not an author (as institution or authority) but an author *function*; a historically contingent construction; a creation of culture rather than a 'natural' being with innate genius. Literary language is important for Foucault because it is language working at the limits of expression, language that pushes us to witness the shattering of the fiction of the self and the prevalence of historical process and reinvention. At the end of his career, Foucault will reflect upon the ethical and aesthetic conditions necessary for self-creation, for self-stylisation and for an art of pleasure. First, it seems, he needed to demonstrate the complete erasure of selfhood through extreme literary language, the death of the existential ego – a concept of self that dominated his intellectual

environment – in order to imagine new possibilities for philosophy and experience.  
(Downing, 2008: 83)

My hope for a practice of autofiction is that it opens up the possibility for precisely this reinvention of the self “as it disappears from focus” (Downing, 2008). I am less interested in my “authorship” of the stories I write and more interested in the epistemological transformation (reinvention) that comes from the practice of playing with versions of life and self. Where language is “working at the limits of expression”, which I take to mean language as an artistic or aesthetic expression beyond a means of communication, we are brought “to witness the shattering of the fiction of the self.” As I crafted the stories of Haven and Keira, their context, choices and worldviews emerged as similar to but divergent from my own narrative about myself, revealing to me through a fictional mirror, if not “a complete erasure of selfhood,” then certainly a series of refractions of selfhood. These stories, which are not precisely about me but could be, are able to trace a Foucauldian genealogy, isolating certain aspects of the construction of self, foregrounding and thus offering up for critique elements which otherwise remain assumed. Stories about Haven might trace colors and textures of an educated New England family gone bohemian. Parts of Keira shine a spotlight on the expectations and responsibilities of 21<sup>st</sup> Century cycles of marriage and divorce. Haven’s sister and mother reveal familial ties and Keira’s husband might show glimpses of the modern crisis of masculinity. Each of these -and myriad other- sides of the narrative prism could give rise to a whole chapter or thesis, yet I am, at this stage, interested primarily in the method and practice that find strength in Foucault’s concepts of genealogy, selfhood, authorship (or lack of it) and the power of language.

Downing goes on, in the final chapter of her introduction to Foucault, to describe Foucault’s influence on queer theory, which relies especially on his ideas on the production and subversion of knowledge. Queer has its origin in homosexual identity, but finds resonance in any discourse that attempts to subvert, rather than vanquish, a dominant culture:

No longer a self-loathing nomenclature, or a quest for liberation based solely on fixed notions of ‘identity’, queer instead became a play with knowledge production: a means of resisting homophobia which exposed the mechanisms of oppression rather than arguing for ‘rights’ within the terms of the dominant culture. (Downing, 2008: 114)

This has implications, as Downing points out, for how we might conceive of “play” (in the context of this inquiry, fiction and theatre) as a tool for subversion as well as a way to see one’s own identity and its construction:

The ideas that parody and play are strategic political tools, and that identities can be *constituted* through practices and bodily acts, rather than *discovered* using the tools of psychoanalysis, have been key in the development of queer theory as a mode of political and academic praxis. (Downing, 2008: 115)

As I have tried to show through the use of autofiction and (much more physically) in the use of Forum Theatre, “parody and play” are indeed powerful tools for exposing and subverting culturally constructed perception of the self and of power relations in communities and organizations. Foucault illuminates the possibility of subverting the cultural structures (such as identity) that we ourselves contribute to erecting through methods that are physical and playful (for example, autofiction and Forum Theatre) rather than cerebral and clinical (such as psychoanalysis).

By examining the histories of medical practices (*The Birth of the Clinic*, 1963) and prisons (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975) and later ideas around knowledge, power and sexuality (*The History of Sexuality* 1,2 and 3), Foucault invited the post-modern public into a space in which we could begin to see, albeit fleetingly, how our intersubjective beliefs are constructed and how they affect our behavior.

Through his archaeologies and genealogies, which aim to uncover the conditions that made possible certain historical and sociological developments, Foucault seemed to want to explain why we believe what we believe and therefore behave, as a society, as we do, and how these histories and beliefs continue to condition our present and future. When I apply Foucault’s genealogical insights to my own work with fiction and theatre, what I find most useful is his dedication to “seeing through” to the skeleton (or archeology) of what is behind cultures and behaviors.

As in the adoption of the term “queer” in sexual politics, Foucault’s influence is playful, experimental and linguistically rich. Engaging in autofiction and in Forum Theatre with a Foucauldian eye to exposing what is beneath the surface leads me to do this work of extending my own and others’

epistemologies far more consciously and, I hope, productively. The productive result of exposing the archaeology of life situations in an epistemologically extended manner is a heightened awareness and clearer of view of the actual and potential playing fields in which we act. Foucault's unpicking of relationships of power relate to Harari's intersubjective beliefs in that the creation of dominant fictions has a conditioning effect on the lives of millions, as we believe and reproduce those fictions and relationships of power many times over, through time. Downing says about Foucault's work on power:

We are encouraged to think about the power of discourse in a way that avoids the simplistic binary categories of good/bad, positive/negative. Power is not something that we can reject or accept; it is not avoidable; rather it is everywhere, it constitutes our force field of interaction, the 'lines of penetration' at the point of convergence of which are our bodies and identities. We all have access to it, whether we are using it assertively or reactively, to compel or to resist. (Downing, 2008: 90)

What I have tried to do, through autofiction and through symbolic work in general (Forum Theatre, for example) is to uncover potential truths about the way we live and relate to each other by changing the form of real life "back" into a fictional form. I try to expose, if only in glimpses, how the fictions that shape our lives, institutions and organizations are as real -and therefore workable- as what we can make up symbolically and playfully, mirroring hard, objective reality with its opposite image: shifting, subjective fiction. If we get used to playing with our fictions we might be able to change the most fixed of fictions that hold us down in the illusion of their immovable truth.

## 2.4 Communicative Action as Fertile Ground for Inquiry

Habermas's concepts of communicative action and communicative space (Habermas, 1985) have emerged as a potentially integrating dwelling place and fertile ground for this inquiry. Whilst I realize that Haven and Keira would not have lasted long if they had decided to rub elbows with Habermas and his fellow Frankfurt School social theorists, I have to admit that the very "allowance" of these two characters as part of my inquiry owes something to said Frankfurt school and even more to the action research tradition which borrows from Habermasian thought. The fact that entre-guerre German philosophy did not include a single woman (with the exception of Hannah Arendt whose relationship with the Frankfurt philosophers was at best tentative and at worst combative) is only one indication that the playful presence of Haven and Keira would not be understood or welcome. However, I have found it useful, despite the potential incongruousness with my characters, to use the backdrop of Habermas's thought, particularly as used and brought to me by Steven Kemmis, in order to locate autofiction and group theatre activities upon a common philosophical ground, as unwelcoming as that ground might have been if its philosophical fathers had any say in the matter.

Kemmis draws on the work of Habermas on communicative action to offer a new definition for critical participatory action research that I have found helpful in synthesizing some of the theories and ideas that have supported both my adventures in autofiction and my embodied work with organizational groups such as image theatre and forum theatre:

Habermas describes communicative action as action oriented toward intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding and unforced consensus about what to do. It is the kind of communication that occurs when people turn aside from strategic action (getting something done) to ask 'what are we doing'? (Kemmis, 2008: 127)

Kemmis draws on communicative action as a central tenet for critical participatory action research because it promotes the social aspect of such research (meant to go beyond self-reflection), the critical aspect (meant to address adverse situations that demand improvement) and the emancipatory potential (carrying the element of hope for a better future). Although I have found his other points about historical consciousness, the nature of practice/praxis, and public discourse

in public spheres to be helpful as well, I will focus on the above three points -the social, the critical and the emancipatory- as central to my inquiry.

In reminding us of the social aspect of Action Research, Kemmis cites Kurt Lewin, whose work revolved around group commitment to social change, and Habermas's critique of the philosophy of the subject, which he claims:

... can no longer be sustained, and [Habermas] proposed instead a post-metaphysical philosophy in which 'truth' becomes manifest only in attempts at 'truth-telling', that is, through exploration of the validity of propositions in communicative action. (Kemmis, 2008: 122)

Both of these ideas, "group commitment to social change" and "the exploration of the validity of propositions through communicative action" are important premises for this inquiry: autofiction, while it takes its origin in explorations of possible selves, is a communicative act, an attempt at truth-telling and, when shared, becomes a basis for collective commitment to change.

Kemmis's definition of critical participatory action research contributes to my own research in that it helps to extend my first-person autofictional inquiry beyond the personal benefit of self-exploration: it sets up autofiction to be a communicative act that can lead to social change. If we believe, as social constructivists have supported, that rational, objective thinking has been overused to support fragmentation and a social order that no longer works for vast numbers of people, then communicative acts can counter such one-sided ways of thinking. The view from Kemmis's Habermasian "communicative space," then, is that our participation in the system world (organizations, institutions, systems of power) demands a "meeting up with" or "confrontation" with representation, with symbolic mirroring of situations and with imaginative feedback in order to shake the foundations of what we are led to believe is right. If Keira -the independent, wounded woman- and Haven -the compliant yet critical thinker- and I -the divided/composite narrator- can come into expression through autofiction, then a communicative space has been modeled and can be replicated in such a way that, in Kemmis's words:



“action research must find a way to work not just on the self-realization of persons or the realization of more rational and coherent organizations, but in the interstices between people and organizations and across the boundaries between life worlds and systems. It must work in the conversations and communications of participants. (...) It must become a process of facilitating public discourse in public spheres. To do this it must be rather different from what is has been.” (Kemmis, 2008: 123)

Through fictional stories from my own lifeworld and (even more so) theatrical stories from various organizational settings, autofiction and Forum Theatre offer a way into “the interstices between people and organizations” in which we can play with the issues that confound us, exploring beneath the surface of our life situations to catch glimpses of other, radical interpretations of them. In autofiction and in Forum Theatre we can manage “attempts at ‘truth-telling’” (Kemmis, 2008: 122). This work is rooted in our storied humanity and blurs the lines between fiction and real life, between Habermas’s life world and system world, and between institutional power and human behavior. It offers us the chance to see the prism of “reality”, bringing us closer to a gaze that is multiple and can show up the hidden constraints and interests that an “objective”, single-story view (Adichie, 2009) does not yield.

Kemmis’s point about the critical nature of action research highlights this tradition’s relationship and commitment to values, “to find how particular perspectives, social structures or practices may be irrational, unjust, alienating or inhumane.” (Kemmis, 2008: 125) He contrasts this approach with positivistic science, which aims to “build scientific knowledge progressively by accumulating empirical knowledge of the world, taking for granted a distinction between facts and values.” (Kemmis, 2008: 125) My own observation is that the opening up of a communicative space as described above (which I have practiced through autofiction and Forum Theatre but which of course can be done in any number of ways) is a necessary condition for “critique,” in the sense that Kemmis and Horkheimer (1972 in Kemmis, 2008) meant it, to arise.

Kemmis’s description of criticality as “trying to find how particular perspectives, social structures and practices ‘conspire’ to produce untoward effects, with the aim of finding ways to change things” is reminiscent of Foucault’s archaeologies and genealogies, in which his concern was to detect the forces beneath the surface to expose the conditions that give rise to certain judgements, injustices,

social arrangements and so on. Foucault's tendency to "parody and play," as Downing (2008) phrases it, allows for criticality to be present, once we understand some of the multiple facets of reality that may be causing unfavorable situations.

Criticality and reaching for emancipation can emerge simultaneously, as the above approach to critical thinking is value-laden and steeped in social justice. Autofiction allows for a communicative space to arise, for discoveries about alternative versions of reality to emerge and for a critical view of what is to be present in the stories. Similarly, Forum Theatre begins with a representation of a situation that does not lead to flourishing or emancipation for the participants. It therefore opens a communicative space that is begging for criticality and emancipatory aspirations.

The methods of autofiction and Forum Theatre developed in this inquiry lead to a multiple, critical view that arises from "parody and play" (Downing, 2008) and holds the potential to "transform reality in order to investigate it" (Kemmis, 2008: 132). These methods result therefore in the performance of (action) research in reverse in order to "write the history of the future by acting deliberately to interpret and learn from what happens." (Kemmis, 2008: 132)

I picture Haven and Keira stepping lightly down a spiral staircase, Keira with a glass of wine for each of them and Haven on the phone to one of her children, descending toward a sweet-smelling garden. Behind them, some way up the staircase, the shadow of Michel Foucault peeks out and over the banister now and then to catch glimpses of them. Even further up, where there is hardly any memory of the staircase reaching the garden, Habermas and Horkheimer sit on a step, looking at their shoes and talking confidently, only faintly wondering whence the vibrations in the structure might be coming.

### Chapter 3

#### Granular theory: Ingredients for doing inquiry

Sarah Morton, whose thesis provided me with encouragement to keep writing the autofiction that was emerging as part of my inquiry, quotes Mellor (2001) who talks about writing as an “honesty train”. (Morton, 2008)

This chapter on Granular Theory charts the various currents that together have led me to my own method of inquiry through writing. I will explain the ways in which I have relied on authors who have already opened the way for experimental, non-traditional social science. My intention is to theoretically ground my method by situating it among the authors cited in this chapter. The granular theory, as I call it -because it is the textured process of feeling my way into a method that works for me- should provide the scholarly/writerly landscape into which I am including artistic writing in a thesis about making change happen in myself, in groups and in organizations. I will also suggest the ways in which my own process of learning, practice, reflection and writing contributes to bringing artistic and aesthetic practices and criteria to change processes as well as to the writing up –or academic representation- of change processes.

*There is a doctoral-sounding voice ringing through the thin (mental) wall: “put your life to rights, get it under control, make it dormant, set it aside, and you will be able to properly inquire and write.”* Enter Ellis and Bochner who suggest that “sometimes life gets in the way” and we need to let it in, embrace it, admit it as part of the inquiry process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). First-person action research and its background, beginning with the crisis of representation, the linguistic turn and eventually the action turn –in which academics have advocated for the acknowledgement of the position and bias of the researcher/writer as a necessary aspect of honest inquiry- indeed calls for me, the inquirer, to include my personal involvement in the work I do: my reflection process, the workings of my writing process and my own stake in the production of text and in my engagement with action. In order to unpack such grand headings, I will take the reader through my encounters with particular approaches to inquiry and writing that have contributed to the main notion of this work, namely that we must tap into our “presentational knowing” (Reason & Heron, 2008) to bring about positive and sustainable change.

In the first section I situate my epistemology as the underpinning of my emerging voice; the second section follows my theoretical journey towards writing as inquiry; the third section offers four specific frameworks that I have used for writing as inquiry; and the fourth section proposes a new stance from which to look back at the ground I have covered and forward at the possibilities ahead.

### 3.1 Fiction and the Crafting of a Feminist Epistemology

Haven and Keira are living different moments of the same epistemic trajectory: that of a modern western, educated, female worldview. In this chapter I explore the role and effect of “womanhood” upon the crafting of stories, the existence of Haven and Keira as fictional alter-ego’s, and the epistemological implications of being a modern, western, educated, female researcher. The stories, the characters, the inquiry and I myself are all born into this text in the context of a still-male-dominant culture. This inquiry has feminist motivations and implications at its core and in its emancipatory aspirations.

The hundreds of girls who were abused by their USA gymnastics team doctor, Larry Nassar, were vulnerable and voiceless because they were mere instruments in the pursuit of glory and wealth for the USA gymnastics committee and the Olympic committee. The systems of power conspired to keep its victims silent. The #MeToo movement undoubtedly provided a backdrop for the sheer numbers of athletes to come forward and finally be heard. While I do not want to compare the “trials and tribulations” of any person’s life to the experiences of those young girls who were repeatedly abused as children, I would like to suggest that playing with the facets of our identities, acknowledging that identities can be less fixed than our systems demand, is a way of getting into the cracks in hegemonic systems and, from a starting point of subtle subversion, arrive at the possibility of revolution. Butler (1990) and Haraway (1985) both suggest in their respective concepts of “doing” rather than “having” gender and finding points of “affinity” among women as opposed to focusing on dividing identities, that one of feminism’s most important functions is gradual dissolution of what appear to be fixed and immovable systems of power.

Haraway (1985) writes about “making partial, real connection” among women with vastly different experiences and competing allegiances in order to avoid the traps of universalism on one end of the spectrum, in which feminist discourse assumes a unifying character of womanhood, and fragmentation into “boundless differences” (Haraway, 1985) on the other extreme. Partial, real connection might be as much as we can hope for and indeed might be far more powerful than we imagine. What might have been different if those young gymnasts had had stronger connections to each other, resulting in more in-depth dialogue about their abuse, or partial, real connection with adults who could look critically at the system of power in which they lived and practiced their sport?

Haraway's use of the word "partial" is particularly meaningful in the context of her article "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," in which she writes of the danger and promise of an emerging post-modern being that blurs the boundaries between nature and technology. Haraway's provocative writing on where humanity might be headed in a world of hybrid technological culture is sometimes reminiscent of Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" (1932) in which all human emotion is traded for a synthetic formula for happiness that relies on order, control and technology. Haraway goes farther than this however, to suggest that the upside of such a new paradigm is that there is power and promise in a social order that is less binary and more fluid, despite its dangers. The new human, or cyborg, in Haraway's article, is itself a partial being: a connection point between human and technological possibilities.

I believe it is I-the-woman who writes most genuinely: I impersonated Virginia Wolff in the introduction to this thesis; I rely on the critical perspectives of Harstock, Butler and Haraway and on the epistemological evolution of women's expressivity in Chapter 3 (Belenky et al, 1986), among other feminist influences. The relationship between feminism and post-modernism offers a sometimes wrenching tension between scholarship and femininity, which I believe is obliquely reenacted in my stories about Haven and Keira: each of them embraces different forms of feminine tastes and pleasures, while not renouncing their taste for Frankfurt School philosophy, when it suits. Mary Beard (2017) describes the historical incompatible coupling of women and power that stems from our classical cultural heritage. Power being disallowed for women since our Greek and Roman cultural origin, she argues, is largely still present and accountable for women's silence and/or contested right to speak up and assume power. There is an ambiguity in claiming one's womanhood while also claiming a voice that is powerful. This requires a double epistemology as both woman and scholar, or woman and leader, which leads me to draw on philosophy and fiction at the same time. My reading of Foucault is that he occupied a similarly subversive space, though not intentionally for feminism (Nancy Hartsock argues that Foucault offers no way forward for feminism), in which he gives credence and acknowledgement to his epistemological grounding in the history of philosophy but breaks out into a new voice and an emerging epistemological perspective. Writing creative fiction about women characters in a thesis about theories of change is a balancing act, an oscillating movement meant to destabilize and lead to a different worldview.

Harstock (1987) argues that theorizing from the perspective of the other is exactly what marginalized groups have not been able to (credibly) do: "We who have not been allowed to be subjects of history, who have not been allowed to make our history, are beginning to remake our pasts and remake our futures in our own terms." (Harstock, 1987: 163) She considers that Foucault remains at the point of making "room only for abstract individuals, not women, men, or workers." ((Harstock, 1987: 169) And her critique of post-modernism in general is that "despite its stated efforts to avoid the problems of European modernism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at best manages to criticize these theories without putting anything in their place." (Harstock, 1987: 159)

In my own writing and theorizing, I have relied on Foucault opening the door to creative interpretations of otherness, to playful yet serious experimentation. Along with Harstock (1987), I am suspicious of post-modernism's doing away with subjectivity, right when women (and other groups) might be at the point of being able to claim their own. And yet the very fragmentation to which Foucault gives way allows for other voices to be heard. I don't believe we are striving for a female hegemony or for a new univocal power that replaces that of dominating man's, but for voices to be heard in chorus with each other, sometimes dissonant and sometimes in harmony. The lack of order that defines dissonance may occur as a result of subverting dualisms, as Donna Haraway (1985) advocates in her startling article (even 20 years later!) on incorporating technology into our humanity as a way of escaping the binary confrontation of man and woman, organism and machine, insider and monster, dominating subject of history and oppressed other(s). My own experience is that freeing one's consciousness from such dualisms is a daunting and risky task and one which in my case has required and is requiring a process of letting go of my own original myths by playing at constructing alternative new ones. My experience of Haraway's text itself calls up imagery of hacking my way through a jungle of vaguely familiar terms arranged in nearly impenetrable thickets of growth. It is hard going and there is a sense of not being sure whether it is safer to turn back or forge ahead, and yet occasional clearings allow cathartic moments of understanding, hope and excitement about the possible present and future of her feminist cyborg consciousness.

For Haraway, language itself carries with it the phallogocentric code of domination. To move beyond the dangers of language and dualism, which would only serve to dominate some other other, she

proposes partiality and the end of human wholeness by embracing a third element which is neither man nor woman, self nor other, but the partial, synthetic yet integral cyborg:

The partiality of feminist points of view has consequences for our expectations of forms of political organization and participation. We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of a perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradiction. Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos. From the point of view of pleasure in these potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology, there might indeed be a feminist science. (Haraway, 1985: 215)

Haraway insists that a feminist politics does not require an agreed common identity as women or “second sex.” What it does require is overthrowing the binary structures of domination that keep all women, in their diverse diaspora, in the position of being dominated. By embracing a cyborg nature, feminists gain the potential “of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control.” (Haraway, 1985: 217)

I am as ambivalent about embracing my cyborg self as I am about wholesale rejection of the cultural myths that have defined me thus far: myths of womanhood, motherhood, goodness, professionalism, earned and unearned privilege, intelligence, education and safety. As Haraway notes, “we have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfillment in apocalypse.” (1985: 217) But I am more reluctant to ride these myths into the apocalypse since I have engaged in the creative process of considering alternative stories. By writing about Haven and Keira, I have allowed for my own post-modernist fragmentation.

Releasing the play of writing is deadly serious. The poetry and stories of U.S. women of color are repeatedly about writing, about access to the power to signify, but this time that power must be neither phallic nor innocent. Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive not on the basis of original innocence, but on



the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (Haraway, 1985: 217)

Haven and Keira have taken up these tools with me. Our work is not finished, but our method is established. Together we have forged another character, Katherine-the-consultant-change-worker-scholar, who believes in finding imaginal, physical and relational ways of uncovering and challenging dominant systems in organizations, whether through Forum Theatre, as I describe in Part II, or other methods such as poetry work or narrative leadership (Mead, 2014 and Stanford, 2018). In my work with others my intention is not “to mark the world,” as it is in my writing of fiction, but to hand over the tools for others to find the cracks in their own systems of power and mark them if they wish.

### 3.2 Epistemology and voice

*An olive tree can only grow to be as big above ground as it is under ground. If its roots are constricted in any way, by a planter or by construction or even soil that hardens too much in the dry season, the root system grows in on itself, cannot expand and the branches reaching up are arrested in their efforts. An underdeveloped olive tree is stagnant above because it is constricted below. Our individual and collective thinking, in organizations and in society, is constrained and dwarfing our growth, our health and our planet. What are the underground structures that bind us? How can we break them up without damaging our roots? We strive to reach higher, without constraint, relieving pressure, to find more air, more room, more weightless flight.*

Lyotard (1979) considered that the “grand narratives” or metanarratives were a quintessential feature of modernity that were rendered unnecessary by our ability to reproduce and disseminate information on a massive scale. In our post-modernity, we could now be free of the “totalitarianism of metanarratives” because technology and its myriad channels of communication in a sense freed us from the need to rely on one source of information/knowledge/ interpretation. Where this flow was once reified and one-way, it is now multiple and viral.

Social science has gradually broadened its gaze away from the linear Cartesian view that scientific knowledge is certain, towards a holistic view that allows for emergent properties. Quantum physics led to systems thinking which “involves a shift from objective to ‘epistemic’ science; to a framework in which epistemology - ‘the method of questioning’ - becomes an integral part of scientific theories.” (Capra, 1997: 22) Since the method of questioning involves certain choices – i.e. the inclusion of some things to the exclusion of others - then it follows that knowledge can only be approximate. In other words, there is no single story. Capra describes developments in scientific thinking and method that opened up new ways of understanding the world in a context that he calls a “deep ecology.” Capra heralded a new paradigm in which individuals and society are embedded in (and dependent on) “the cyclical processes of nature.” (Capra, 1997: 6) As echoed in Scharmer and Kaufer’s (2013) work, which highlights the divide between self and nature as one of the major blind spots of our current society, Capra points to sustainability as “the greatest challenge of our time: to create sustainable communities, i.e. social and cultural environments in which we can satisfy our needs and aspirations without diminishing the chances of future generations.” (Capra, 1997: 4) The “web of life” and an interconnected, holistic view of self, community and planet emerge from these

and other works as alternatives to the single story. If Lyotard and the postmodernists saw this emerging, plurivocal paradigm as replacing the industrial and Cartesian view of science and society, and if we are now standing at the edge of social, environmental and personal loss, as we seem to be, what views and voices are being included (or need to be included) in our collective epistemologies? Why have we not changed or why are we not changing more visibly and audibly, more collectively and more boldly?

Speaking, expression and developing one's voice are central to Belenky et al.'s study of women's development which tells of a progression from silence to connected knowing: each stage is slightly less reliant on trusting of outside and imposed knowledge; in the most developed stages, the women studied are able to combine knowledge from outside and inside themselves to achieve the "critical subjectivity" that affords voice and agency based on the fluid interaction of self and self, self and others and self and universe.

For over a month, during April and May of 2014 and all the way from Barcelona to Peru and back on a series of teaching engagements, I carried two books, always with me, always together. One was *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Belenky et al. (1986) and the other was *The Birth of Pleasure* by Carol Gilligan (2002). I heard in these works a plurality of voices guiding me to know my own voice, to discover its sources and to know its evolving strength.

After extensive interviews and research, Belenky et al. (1986) classify the women in their study in five successive categories which I have found useful to outline, while situating myself along the continuum that they describe and interacting with each stage:

#### 1. Silence

Women who are experiencing silence, in the sense that they cannot seem to voice their own views, needs or feelings are entirely reliant on being told what to do. Authority stands fixedly outside of them. They are protected but helpless. I have sometimes felt silenced and wondered with a sense of nagging reproach why I was not speaking up, just nodding my head, trying not to look sheepish because I was hiding a deep and fundamental disagreement, but assimilating the gap and carrying on.

Carol Gilligan's interpretation of the myth of Psyche and Cupid positions Psyche as the one who rejects patriarchy and all its tragic endings (in particular contrast to the Oedipal myth, which has such a central role in our western cultural imagination). (Gilligan, 2002) Tragedy, in many of our myths and stories, is repeatedly brought about by a woman's pleasure leading to a fight between men and resulting in loss for everybody. It is by looking shamelessly at her lover and speaking about love that Psyche is able to break the chain. Her boldness jeopardizes both her love and her life, but in remaining true to herself she changes the fateful outcome of tragedy and loss. Gilligan highlights the importance of seeing and speaking, as well as the complex bond between women (in this case between Psyche and Cupid's mother, Venus) as the forces that defeat the pattern of love leading to tragic loss.

I find the times I have been silent, it has not been for a lack of words. They simply stay in, ingrown, hunched over, condensed, where only the deepest compassion can pluck them out.

#### *Music Lessons*

*Haven's voice was clear and strong in the classroom, oboesque, warm but not too girly. In conversation she sometimes heard herself sounding a bit nasal and tried to correct by connecting with her chest voice. But in front of an audience, her voice worked. It projected, it conveyed calm guidance, with enough inquiring notes and gestures and eye-contact to invite her audience to join her. "You could afford to just step out a bit more," people would tell her, particularly Scott and her HR colleague Mary, who was a successful, savvy woman about ten years her senior who bubbled with a desire for connection and fun whenever they met at leadership events around the world. Mary was always up for a last drink, which would loosen her tongue and then she would spend the next day campaigning to make sure Haven and Scott, her most regular companions on these jaunts, would not reveal her indiscretions.*

*Once, after childbirth and a year of marital angst, Haven lost her voice for over a year. Her clear oboe muted into a raspy Spanish guitar. Sexy, some noted, but it required effort and there was very little singing to be done with such a voice. The moments of sitting around the dinner table with her parents*

*and siblings –now even her young children joined in with clear, chiming timbres- inventing polyphony and dirty jazz chords were a bit lost on her, the once soprano.*

*One summer she and Ring left all the children behind and travelled out to Montana to fish in the wild raging rivers, connect with the times they had spent in the west and finalize the sale of the first house they had owned together. Riding in their rented car, she naturally sang along quietly with Alison Krauss. Nudged perhaps by Alison, wobbly at first then as big and clear and blue as the endless Montana sky, her voice sprang forth. It was clear, painless, perfectly in tune and felt like a river pouring out into its beautiful ocean home. She was aghast, hearing her own sound.*

*Haven had all but forgotten about her voiceless year. Now, years later, reading about “voice” in academic papers while suffering from a sore throat, she suddenly remembered and saw connections between that year, her then tiny children, her husband’s meanderings at that time and she wondered whether her voice had not been stripped from her throat by life itself, rather than a virus or a polyp or a cold gone wrong.*

*“What voice do I have now?,” she wondered, “and is it at the mercy of something?”*

*Maybe voice was conditional. Maybe it depended on how much care she took of the forces within herself. Maybe it hinges on not giving in all the time, or even on not squeaking but booming about things like infidelity, insensitivity, pain, numbness and being taken for granted.*

## 2. Received knowledge

Received knowers find under cover ways to express...something. Not much, there is no throaty singing but there is a sense on oneself, an existence, a starting point. They exist for the sake of others and from their ontological perspective:

They should devote themselves to the care and empowerment of others while remaining ‘selfless.’ Accepting that the world is and should be hierarchically arranged

and dualistic, the received knowers channel their increasing sense of self into their growing capacity to care for others. (Belenky et al, 1986: 46)

I wonder who has not been this woman, the one who falls into trap after trap for the sake of being thanked, feeling giving, sowing love and reaping responsibility: “The women who hold the perspective of received knowledge feel quite comfortable with advancing themselves, only if it is clear that self-advancement is also a means of helping others.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 47) And yet this is a step, a palpable existence that breathes and sweats and makes a difference: “Being thrust into roles of responsibility for others helps erode the belief that they are dependent on ‘them’ for ‘truth.’ For these women it is the act of giving rather than receiving that leads them to a greater sense of their capacity for knowing and loving.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 47)

*Haven often blamed her husband for her inability to plan ahead much, usually attributing this to the unpredictable nature, especially financial, of being married to an artist. In fact, it was more predictable than it seemed: they were always out of money. But one always hoped that around a corner or under a rock there was going to be wealth, comfort, salvation, fame, change.*

The more evolved received knowers in Belenky et al’s description start to critique their own indecision, inability to plan and susceptibility to the influence of others: “The women discovering the limits of received knowing bring this era to an end with critiques of their tendency to subordinate their own perceptions and judgments to those of others, of their selflessness, and of their voicelessness.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 51)

*The inward focus of pregnancy gave Haven a horizon, a relative certainty, an event in the future that would bring change, development, challenge, satisfaction and the promise of love. Why all the babies? Of course now they were not mere decisions, they were pulsing, acting, catalyzing, love-bound people. But at one point they had been mere decisions, straws to be clutched at, ideas of hope, mirages of stability. Images of a life that looked full as she walked down the street with them, all so diminutively blonde and loved and joyous. She was the voice of loving order that came from a place of inner chaos, lack of vision, or maybe just blind faith in love and romance. She regretted not a single atom of them, yet her decision which had been “for her” led to her own vanishing. She worked, created meals, sat up late with Ring trying to see through shaky finances. Haven loved the babies,*

*became their future and watched herself disappear. She was admitted into a top women's choir one fall, one of the best in the country, but quit after a month because the family could not survive one night a week without her home. Years later she marveled at the flawed thinking behind that decision.*

*When she was visibly pregnant her swelling body spoke of a time horizon, a plan, a deliberate endeavor with specific expected outcomes. She had a project, a purpose, an outbound focus that was both outward and inward, sure and hers and precious and certain, like Charlotte, the spider in "Charlottes's Web" weaving her web industriously and with calm certainty that this is what she must do and only she can do it. (White, 1952)*

If received knowers start to evolve by means of being frustrated by their own lack of initiative and resolve, then perhaps one way to begin to lift the weight of hierarchy is to test, explore and challenge this very emotion in ourselves: when in my life do I feel indecision? When do I fail to stick by my own decisions? Haven's and Keira's stories allow these discoveries to roll out in my cognitive playing field.

### 3. Subjective knowledge

"From passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protecting inner voice and infallible gut" (Belenky et al, 1986: 54): Belenky et al warn against the dangers for women who exclusively trust their intuitive epistemology in the public learning and working spheres. Those funny looks that people sometimes give when I slip into the private sphere, when I speak without "supported" data-butresses to what I am saying, when I don't know factually, but just feel. Or is it my own judgment creeping into their eyes through my ears?

There are women (also perhaps men, I presume) who, although at the outset are looking for an authority outside themselves to give them certainty and direction, instead find it inside and sign up, fervently, as if they had seen the light of a new religion: "They had spent their lives looking for some faithful authority to whom they could attach themselves – if not this father, perhaps this boyfriend or this husband." (Belenky et al, 1986: 57) The external (male) authority has failed for many of these women and so they have found it within. The most blatant reason for this "failure" cited by Belenky et al. is sexual harassment or abuse, but it is not the only cause. Some of the women interviewed in

their study simply had some success in following this “inner voice” that they had not experienced before, and stuck with it.

*Keira, far more than Haven, listens to her inner voice. She is often called by such a cacophony of voices that it is hard to pick one out from another, hear over the din and discern whether they compete or harmonize with each other. Lately her limbs and empty caverns in her abdomen are helping her to feel out voices. Often she feels only vibrations, like the hard of hearing or like ancient tribesmen, putting their ears to the ground. And while it is unfamiliar, this trusting of her inner voice, she is drawn to it now and feels that it works. She has found a new and vertiginous friend.*

One sort of subjective knower is the “hidden multiplist.” She is generally from an educated background and fairly traditional family structure. She holds back, hesitating to speak out and to express her opinions. She fears that speaking out will leave her standing alone: “This is the kind of woman whose parents tell her to develop enough marketable skills so that she will have something to fall back on if her husband loses his job, dies, or divorces her.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 56) And indeed women’s education in general can be seen, at worst, to serve this purpose. My own family professes to be far beyond this point, yet I can remember my grandfather asking my father: “Why do you want to spend all that money on college? Why not just send her to secretarial school?” Luckily for me, I attended university on a scholarship.

I recognize in myself the “retreat into anonymity and surface conformity by adopting a wait-and-see attitude.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 66) In my university classes and even graduate school I was happy to be one of “the polite listeners, the spectators who watch and listen but do not act. In the classroom, they keep quiet while performing adequately.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 66) I remember disagreeing often with class discussions, or even personal discussions, but almost never feeling that I had enough strength, enough of an arsenal of arguments and vehemence, to break in to the dance myself.

*Haven adopted a relaxed pose, foot tucked under her thigh, torso twisted in an informal perch, all the while rigid and on high alert inside the walls of her stomach.*



*"What are the words you want to say to him?", the therapist asked. His unrelenting patience weighed on her soul like an old horse blanket.*

*"I want to be free," she said. "But..." Her pose broke apart. "I can't do this" she complained. "It just feels fake."*

*"Say the words you want him to hear," he coaxed, ventriloquist mouth barely moving. Haven wanted to kick the empty chair in front of her and walk out onto the stormy beach and let the wind roil her hair.*

*"I want to be free... I want you to be happy... I want to make you happy." Her eyes flash over to his and she knows that for now she has passed the test. She wonders whether he can hear the lying tinge in her voice. Her uneasiness, she knows, is the price of guarding the truth, at great cost, to shield herself from her own release. He, they, the therapist, must all be kept at bay.*

Belenky et al. talk about the hidden multiplist's inability to find emotional and intellectual mentors, because they are unable to share the private intellectual dialogue they hold within. Here I note that I did not connect in any meaningful way with any adults in high school or university. In graduate school I did just barely, and mostly through the easy (for me) emotional bond of giving birth to my first son in the middle of the year. I had support and benefit-of-the-doubt, confidence and a tenuous bond with my professors. I was apart from other students. Children, childbirth and people's curiosity about big families have been a substantial source of authority for me. My voice is clear and sure in this space, and yet I do feel it is somewhat facile. The production of babies brought an honorary degree of sorts, a pedigree, a status, an image, a successful venture, a voice. "Hidden multiplists can be silently alienated from the educational process, knowing somehow that their conformity is a lie and does not reveal the inner truth or potential that they have recently come to value." (Belenky et al, 1986: 68) I have been on this brink, daring to be involved, to do the work, to earn the degrees, but rarely to speak out fully.

The authors mention a "still small voice" that emerges and is "the hallmark of women's emergent sense of self and sense of agency and control." (Belenky et al, 1986: 68) The beauty of this small

voice is that it is always there, sometimes louder, sometimes inaudible, just a murmur, but I can feel it leaking out, like air from a beach ball, and I can see it leaking in others.

I can see my friend Nira, a tall strong woman with a deep voice and extraordinary credentials in finance and school boards and cultural interests, cooking, art, wine and travel. And yet when she tells us –usually directing her speech to my husband, who is tall and strong like she is- of her imminent move to the middle-east, the great school there, the amazing job opportunity, there is a space at the corners of her mouth that lets slip that truthful inner whisper, that she also can hear and feel, that tattle-tales on her uncertainty, her loneliness, her husband’s wanderings and the desolate ache in her hands when she realizes these are no longer what her pre-teen children need. Not those brown able hands anymore, but something deep in her like the place she feels the rain drenching in her soul when she goes back to India and sees her mother and smells the turmeric on her saris. It is this inner memory that her children need now, their sense of her deeper self, and she cannot let these whispers come out, here in the west, where her husband paints and gallivants. She needs rainy seasons and heat and spices and mother and aunts to let that come through her hands. And so she’s leaving. She cannot express all this over coffee on a Saturday morning with another couple and their beautiful blue-eyed daughter, another broken-down couple, trying to grasp for new rules. But there is that whisper at the corners of her high-up very-smart mouth that speaks to my own whisper, that lets me know she can hear it. She is looking for a place to put her hands. Her very-smart head can go anywhere it pleases.

Nira is moving because that inner voice needs a change of scenery to come out. Me, I dream of getting away to the mountains or the coast to write and breathe and feel my skin brush against the universe, but I sit here in my bedroom, a lucky spot nonetheless, and I can hear a child of mine bravely reaching for the soul of Chopin, through the closed door, all the way at the other end of the apartment. It’s still halting, but I can tell it speaks to him, the stormy masculinity of rolling dark chords. As an emergent subjective knower, I am indeed “obsessively preoccupied with a choice between self and other, acting on behalf of self as opposed to denying the self and living for and through others.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 77) Where is this balance? Where in me? Where is there a way of expressing my care and love without losing my voice?

There lies a challenge to love myself the way I love others, giving me space, letting me come around to certain things, indulging my insecurities and cravings, understanding that I do not always know, cannot always decide, feel lost, hear still-small voices, and then come back, almost the same, after not much time.

#### 4. Procedural knowledge

I have been comfortable and successful in learning environments all my life. On first reading about procedural knowers I thought: “this is not me.” But upon going back through these stages, identifying my tendencies in each epistemological stance, I do see myself as a procedural knower in many ways: I have had a privileged education; I come from an intellectual and artistic family; I have been steeped in conversations about beauty and meaning and the magnetism of knowing; I have felt that sneaky attraction to “being smart” ever since anyone looked at me in surprised admiration when I, the awkward pudgy girl, received the best mark or got a special mention on an essay assignment or a history project.

Procedural knowers’ inner subjectivist voice begins to fade as reasoning and analysis enter the scene. A procedural knower can find herself “developing a new voice, but it is not yet hers, and the older inner voice was fading.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 93) It leads to a new kind of partial silence: “Women in this position think before they speak; and, because their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards, they speak in measured tones. Often, they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence: on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 95)

My own inner voice is not always strong. A bit like my singing voice, it is true, clear and vital, but it is soft, a bit too sweet and secondary for me to hear it over the din, heed it, let it take the stage when my heart is shrinking into the wings. I feel the notes gaining strength now, as I listen, they get bolder, moving away from the sweet tones of a child-soprano toward the rich emergence of a contralto. I remain a “separate knower”, suspicious, often silent in my life, but I find comfort in reason and speak out when I know I know. The inner voice is helping me to judge the separate voice, to encourage its being heard. The contralto on the inside is giving just an extra strand of strength to the child-soprano on the stage.

“Fake it until you become it” is another tactic of separate knowers that I can find in my approach especially to technical or purely professional challenges. In love, in childrearing, in “daughtering” I have been more intuitive, more meandering and guided by my heart and sometimes by my sharp tongue. But in meetings, projects and classrooms I have been willing to push myself beyond what I thought were my abilities, to accept too much and too difficult, for the sake of growth. I feel I can do that, I can stretch. Amy Cuddy speaks about overcoming the notion that “I am not supposed to be here.” (Cuddy, 2012) In her experience, some of us consider that we have been hired to a position or accepted into a school or program by some mistake and we will not make the grade.

Perhaps the reason I hesitate to engage in conflict is because “it’s easy for me to take other people’s points of view.” I often find it hard to argue, because I “feel like I can understand the other person’s argument.” (Belenky et al., 1986: 113) This sentence comes from a connected knower, one who learns through the lenses of other people rather than through the more formal lens of technique or instruction typical of separate knowers. My own procedural knowledge is more connected than separate. What I care about is often connected to people.

Connected knowers may like gossip, as this close and personal talk “proceeds from trust and builds trust.” (Belenky et al, 1986: 116) The authors cite Patricia Spacks on gossip: “Gossip, like poetry and fiction, penetrates through to the truth of things.” What is the role of this kind of knowing in all our social media today? Thinking about gossip, which can create a certain kind of (admittedly not without risk) closeness among people, could encourage us to:

Enter perspectives very different from our own. This requires skill and effort. It is important to distinguish between the effortless intuition of subjectivism (in which one identifies with positions that feel right) and the deliberate, imaginative extension of one’s understanding into positions that initially feel wrong or remote. Connected knowing involves feeling, because it is rooted in relationships; but it also involves thought. (p. 121)

Couldn’t we, by exercising feeling and thought, experience something weightless, non-hierarchical and perhaps more typically “female”? As I inquire, Haven and Keira and their stories provide inroads for me, the researcher, into this procedural way of knowing that melds feeling and thought.

## 5. Constructed knowledge

Life's complexity: life as an interconnected web of equally vital relationships, life not as grounded or founded or firm and built but as liquid, light, nourishing, washing, bounteous and clear. I imagine a crisper view of everything, one that brings out the colors like polarized sunglasses, seeing through flowing water to the rocks and fish balancing on strands of current. Clouds with sharper edges and deeper shadows, trees waving and whispering of their roots, entangled in each other below the ground, maybe sharing water and nutrients from far afield through a complex map of crisscrossing limbs. One leaf speaking through the veins of another's root, miles away.

Some women in Belenky et al.'s study can grasp the promise of constructed knowledge:

The voice of integration within (themselves) that prompted (them) to find a place for reason *and* intuition *and* the expertise of others." (Belenky et al, 1986: 133) (Italics not mine) These women have "learned the profound lesson that even the most ordinary human being is engaged in the construction of knowledge. 'To understand,' as Piaget said, 'is to invent'." (Belenky et al, 1986: 134)

One night over thrillingly cold cava and small bites of perfectly textured salmon, bare arms in the balmy air, I was able to firmly state that my current focus is on my self. The fact that I am learning to listen to my inner voice and that this takes training and concentration and delicate attention, is in sharp contrast to all the years in which my own needs, aspirations, opinions and feeling were secondary to everyone else's around me. I am wary of expressing this as a complaint. It is not. A complaint would require reparations from without, where what my entrails yearn for is forgiveness from within. "I am sorry," I say to that place around my breathing that squeezes tight and triggers the pricking water behind my eyes, extending out through my chest and hovering in my throat. I am sorry. It is a long time. So much silence, so much silly bravery, so much approval, thanks, admiration, recognition, flowers, titles, degrees, invitations, flirtations and phone calls from without, yet nothing, not a fluttering of eyelids from the judge within. Only empty, dark stillness. A crack in the center of my earth, uninhabited, never before touched by light or living organism. And there it is, open and pulsing and fertile, my own center. Birdsing there now, and people wail, and tennis balls are struck, meals devoured, nakedness enjoyed and alpaca blankets tucked. Life passes through,

lingers, leaves its mark in this new land, making scars and leaving debris, filling the space with light and life. If I can keep it open and fill it with forgiveness it will be a place to stay and set up camp. Maybe invite others sometimes.

During the transition into a new way of knowing, there is an impetus to allow the self back into the process of knowing, to confront the pieces of the self that may be experienced as fragmented and contradictory. (Belenky et al., 1986: 136)

These pieces rub against each other with little grease, rubbing raw spots, wheels squeaking, grinding, instruments at odds. I jump from the knowing in my head, to my hands to my aching chest, trying to conduct the voices to sing together, but they are dissonant. Sometimes for a brief moment they can hear each other, adjust their tuning, and light breaks through, but the next measure fogs up the glass again, creating heat but no movement. Will I eventually arrive at “passionate knowing”, “the elaborated form connected knowing takes after women learn to use the self as an instrument of understanding”? Am I beginning to “use connected ‘passionate’ knowing as the predominant mode of understanding” (Belenky et al., 1986: 137) regardless of my very procedural or even received knowing in the past? Is my subjective knowing in check or is it taking over? When husband or sister or child claim that I am becoming obsessed with myself, are these assessments absolute or in sharp contrast with a past me, the one who didn’t bat an eye, who never looked to see a different way?

And now I have a wish: given that “constructivist women need and value attentive strangers as well as understanding friends and colleagues”; and that “learning that their ideas can be taken in and put to use –that their ideas can spark interest among unknown others- is an exhilarating and confirmatory experience;” but also that “constructivist women can end up accommodating the needs and ground rules of men out of the sad wisdom that change does not come easily” (Belenky et al, 1986: 153), I am moved to construct something for others, an experience, a bodily-felt revelation that is not gendered or feminist or labeled in any way, that invokes nothing but our fully extended epistemology and the heaviness or lightness that can be conjured, to open a door to more integrated ways of working across gender, age, position, function, discipline and agenda.

For myself, I still cannot clearly see or hear the way to integration of my self within the lifeworld (Habermas, 1985) I have created. Do I not know enough or in enough ways? Where is my knowledge of this: in my torso, eyes, hips, feet? I must step aside somehow, avoiding destruction, rage, possession and pain. Like a good facilitator, I must expose as many angles, materials, relations, doors, windows, spaces, words and notes to allow the movement to take place around me, with me but also by me. I'm reminded of the energy lines that network system chiropractors use, never touching the body, just manipulating the energy around it. I want to do but not break, act but not disturb. And yet another voice is telling me disturbance is part of this evolution. "The way the world is organized" could be better, could be disturbed, could break to rearrange differently. How will it mend?

Constructivist women "reveal in the way they speak and live their lives their moral conviction that ideas and values, like children, must be nurtured, cared for, placed in environments that help them grow." (Belenky et al, 1986: 152) To live my own purpose, which for several years I have articulated as "creating spaces and environments in which people can grow and flourish," I am drawn to nurture ideas and values through my work with others to make this world more "livable." I hear a voice that speaks from a place that feels like hunger in my belly, above the din of all the years and trials and errors and things I should really know by now, that I can do this for myself in the process, or first, or after, but it will not leave me out. I too will be there, am here now.

*Women's Ways of Knowing* took me through a journey of discovery of my own evolving world view. I was able to critique my own ways of knowing in relation to the default and dominant male standard that the authors describe as a constant reference point or backdrop for the women they interview. As my world view comes into sharper focus against the back drop of Belenky et al's research, I realize what I perhaps already knew, which is that my ways of knowing -and my sense of my own purpose stated above- are indeed a woman's ways. I write this with some hesitance, as the feminist in me struggles to find an epistemological stance that neither universalizes "women's ways" and diminishes them, nor denies that there is indeed an alternative to the dominant and colonizing male world view. I come back to Haraway as I see that what I am reaching for is a power "that is neither phallic nor innocent." (Haraway, 1985) The power that Keira and Haven are circling, each in their own way, comes from a (traditionally) female source of power from connection, that nurtures and allows us to grow in connection.

The work of this thesis is essentially feminist in that it examines and challenges the traditionally male concept of objective truth and of an individual “heroic” way forward. I am exploring alternatives, both for personal relationships and for work in organizations, that acknowledge and celebrate a feminine voice and power without delegitimizing it. This strand of feminist work has been theorized by Joyce Fletcher and before her, Jean Baker Miller. Belenky et al. (1986), whose work I walk through extensively in Chapter 3, describe a developmental spectrum of women who range from a predominant state of silence to constructed knowledge, in which they have found a critical and subjective voice of their own. I also rely on the contributions bell hooks and Carol Gilligan, mainly in their search for voice and feminine agency and pleasure.

Joyce Fletcher writes about the bind that the quest for post-heroic leadership finds itself in: on one hand, organizations recognize that 21st century sustainable profitability is increasingly linked to concepts such as collaborative thinking, innovation, diversity, public perception and other indicators that rely on premises of non-oppression of women and others aspects of traditional “difference” in the workplace; on the other hand, the traditional “subject” of organizational life -the western, typically male figure of power- finds it difficult to give up his heretofore undisputed power. Upon reading the above sentence, it is apparent to me that when I write “organizations recognize...,” the subject of the sentence -organizations- represents the largely white, male power of the modern western workplace. Male figures of power are beginning to recognize that they need more typically feminine values to take hold in organizational life if they are to succeed. Fletcher posits that women (and men) are expected to bring this aspect to work in ways that are invisible:

In Western society women are expected to be the carriers of relational skills and attributes. More important, they are expected not only to provide the collaborative subtext of life that enables individual achievement but to do it invisibly, so the “myth” of individual achievement is not challenged. (Fletcher, 2004: 654)

My work does aim to challenge myths of heroic leadership, individual power and success through violence to others. In my search for expression and growth, for myself and others, I am developing approaches that can be personal, multi-vocal and that move away from the single heroic story by engaging with imaginal knowing -through fiction- and collaborative imaginal knowing -through



theatre. I recognize that both in my writing and my doing of this work, privately and publicly, I am careful to not challenge so directly as to cause outright confrontation. There is a necessary and intentional ambiguity in challenging social and organizational norms. I tell myself that without this caution I would be marginalized and unheard. I also know that my personal safety in the world requires subtle navigation of rebellion. This is not quick work.

Sometimes I have pushed boundaries and they have given way with grace. I remember as a child learning to speak up in class and finding to my surprise that what came out of my mouth was well received. I was a hopeless blusher, eyes stinging from the burning heat of my cheeks and scalp, yet I needed to say my peace. Over the years the blushing subsided and my courage became a trusted ally instead of the aloof friend that only needed to be called upon in distress. There have been other crossings in which I have found it paramount to be careful. Not rushing headlong into the space I occupy at work, not claiming my authority up front but waiting until my moment gradually comes about; not brazenly challenging the rules of parent-child or husband-wife social contracts but experimenting and gradually claiming the viability of a new perspective has worked for me and has kept me from personal harm. My experience is that open conflict results in broken plates and glasses, broken connections, fractured growth, poisoned soil. Rebirth is painful and slow in the aftermath. In a state of shock and fear, the necessity to take cover, retreat and retract leaves me farther away from emancipation than before the dinner plates were thrown. My authority will not, cannot come from force and violence as I find no strength there. It takes me longer to achieve my goals and indeed they shift along the way. I don't wave banners about being a woman who knows things and can use my quirky knowledge for purposes of power. Instead I find my way through images of possibility and growth in connection.

Haven and Keira weightlessly whisper and beckon. Floating, brushing limbs, allowing ideas to rise, leavened, full of air, breath, warm life, soft touches and squishy flesh. Their presence does not sag. They emit, speak, emerge, and like cake fill all the senses and the crannies of our insides. Their fictional participation creates another gaze, a different body, a new me, you and world.

### **3.3 Writing as a Path to Knowing: Autoethnography, Stories, Poems & Dream Work**

I was initially inspired to write in artful ways about topics that matter to me when I noticed the boredom and impatience that I felt when reading certain academic texts. I wanted this text to be different. I knew that, with effort, I could produce something “well-written,” but I also knew that I wanted more: I wanted to hit upon some truths that matter to me and express them in an aesthetically pleasing, linguistically qualitative way. I began to explore my voice(s) through writing fiction alongside the academic writing that seemed to fit a doctoral journey. I was aware that the fictional voices that emerged with most strength were essentially two versions of myself: one an exaggerated version of the real me and the other an exaggerated version of the possible me. I was exploring my own personal, political and social identity through the development of two characters who in many ways took on lives of their own, beyond me and despite me.

The stories about Haven and Keira range from reflections to interjections to autoethnography to fiction. Laurel Richardson points to how the New Journalism in the early twentieth century no longer respected hard and fast distinctions between fact and fiction. (Richardson, 2000) Richardson embraces the collapse of this divide in her own work and encourages other writers to think about what their claim is about the text rather than giving it a specific generic denomination:

The difference is the claim that the author makes for the text. Declaring that one’s work is fiction is a different rhetorical move than is declaring that one’s work is social science. The two genres bring in different audiences and have different impacts on publics and politics –and on how one’s ‘truth claims’ are to be evaluated. These differences should not be overlooked or minimized. (Richardson, 2000)

Richardson points out the choices that we have as writers in postmodernist and poststructuralist paradigms to declare our selected genres, even in simultaneity and with the understanding that we as authors shape the social science we produce as much as the choices of genre (among other choices) shape our own subjectivity within the produced text.

By placing autofictional pieces within a social science doctorate, I am claiming that they are at once fiction and social science. As fiction, they express a creative, imaginal outlet that aims to engage the reader (and the writer) on an intuitive, emotional level. As auto-ethnographic writing, they are a way of exploring what and how I know about myself and about life and language (content and form). In addition, the stories introduce an alternative way (if not entirely new: for other examples see Morton and Traeger) of presenting knowledge within a social scientific context, making use of the presentational form that action research holds as one of four elements of an extended epistemology. (Reason & Heron, 2008) The stories are specifically and not accidentally artistic in their expression as they serve the double purpose of being both the process and the product of inquiry: stories are a method to reveal more of my own subjectivity to myself, as well as offering the reader the chance to tap into his or her own extended epistemology. In other words, by providing an artful expression, we all (writer and readers) engage with a different way of knowing that intends to be artful, aesthetic and emotional, through the presentational form.

From its double identity as fiction and social science, my storytelling about Haven and Keira is, to quote Richardson on language: “a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the Self.” (Richardson, 2000) The question arising as I engage in this type of writing is whether this “particular view” makes my particular politics as an author explicit. As a researcher and author it opens up some poetic license (along with some psychological perspective) to examine the world views of my characters (and therefore my own) in a curious and playful manner. In this way, I find myself closer to some sort of truth even though the approach is via the artifice of fiction. If the aim –particularly in Action Research- is to acknowledge the presence and impact of the researcher on her research, then autofiction could induce a heightened state of awareness of this factor: the researcher has let you into her imagination, so that you can be that much closer to her desires and her agenda than if she simply stated her acknowledgement of this or that bias. For the reader, additional dimensions of the researcher’s perspective are revealed; and for the writer/researcher, these additional perspectives of the self make for an increasing reflexivity or heightened critical subjectivity. The epistemological sources of the inquiry become deeper, more complex and textured through the use of more-than-scientific writing.

Richardson points out that, within postmodernist thought -in which there is no longer the possibility of a single truth but rather a mosaic of aggregating perspectives that together give partial and

multiple views of the world- poststructuralism offers the qualitative researcher two helpful tenets: we can see the self reflexively, taking into account our subjectivity and partiality; and we are not bound to produce a “single text,” or, in other words, proclaim the ultimate truth in our writing, but are rather invited to contribute to knowledge from a particular (reflexive) standpoint. This is precisely what Haven and Keira do in this inquiry: they offer located, subjective articulations of experience, in addition to linguistic and aesthetic experimentation. The inquiry takes form as polyphony, through the multiple voices of my fragmented, post-modern identity.

Richardson is encouraging in this respect:

Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of “science writing” on our consciousness as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche; writing is validated as a method of knowing. (Richardson, 2000)

How present are our own voices in the texts we produce as researchers? Much attention has been paid to this question, particularly in the Action Research tradition. Mantzoukas argues in favor of non-positivism, and within that framework, of acknowledging the ontology, epistemology and presence of the researcher in the research and in the text. He also sees positive possibilities in the reader becoming the researcher or being taken along on a research journey, citing Barthes’ death of the author and beginning to hint at a scheme that beguiles the reader into taking authorship for the research, as he interprets it. (Mantzoukas, 2010)

bell hooks (1991) professes to express herself from a position of repression or marginality: “Often... we are speaking to those who dominate.” She refers to “the effort to speak” and to the pain of silence in the brokenness of oppressed voices. There is a struggle for words in hooks’ work. She repeatedly stresses that “language is also a place of struggle.” Hooks is striving to let her location, past and present, shine through in her voice and in her writing in order to highlight the struggle as a starting point for change. She is careful to point out that she wants her words not only to represent who she is right now, but “where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me.” (hooks, 1991: 147) I have a similar response when I imagine the many voices that have influenced me and now speak through me.

Suffering and silence are tantamount to each other in hooks' work, as in some other feminist texts: for Gilligan (2002) and Belenky et al. (1986) having a voice is equated with democracy, with humane existence and with tolerance and freedom. hooks finds and nurtures her voice in the oppressed margins and chooses to stay there, highlighting the roots of her voice. In hooks' case, the political positioning of her voice and her ability to change things depend upon her locating herself in the margin and not joining the colonizing center.

Reading hooks, I am brought to two somewhat opposed reflections on my own research: one is that I am not as much in the margins as bell hooks. I do not come from a poor black community and I am not the first member of my family to go to university or get a graduate degree. Nevertheless, the description of her marginality, of the power and pain of the position she maintains, reminds me, in a trick-of-mirrors way, of my own position as a married woman, a mother, a daughter, a worker, in a world that is unwilling to see me as anything but an example of the goodness of the status quo. I have been able to do so much, to reach great heights of education and professional achievement, to learn, to grow, to bring up children in a world of opportunity and (guarded) hope. I am able -or allowed? - to do all this by agreeing to be held in the center. My forays into the margins of "good womanhood" are silent; I had no words for them yet at the start of this inquiry. Through autofiction, I have played with breaking certain silences. There is therefore a lingering silence that subsides throughout the writing of this text though in some ways not entirely, for reasons of ethical disclosure and harm to self and others.

Andrew Sparkes addresses similar tensions of disclosure in writing autoethnographic scholarship, pointing to the responsibility of the writer/scholar to distinguish between what is written for the "greater good" versus "for my own good," which in his case is one more published article to advance his career or, in my case, a more revealing story that may better qualify as groundbreaking scholarship. I hold this tension appreciatively, for the most part, grateful for the scholarly perspective on life, writing, consciousness and appropriate action and grateful for the aesthetic experience of letting the stories hit the page. Sparkes quotes Winterson on the risks of writing: "There are two kinds of writing; the one you write and the one that writes you. The one that writes you is dangerous. You go where you don't want to go. You look where you don't want to look." (Winterson, 2012 in Sparkes, 2013: 210) Haven and Keira generally write themselves, taking me where I might not want to go or look. One measure of quality for writing this thesis has been to

balance these two kinds of writing, offering the reader the presentational experience of stories that write me and the propositional experience of placing the stories within a scholarly frame. Each voice should make the other sing more truly.

*Keira is sure of her goodness. Her hot shameful tears do not flow from regret, but rather from the burning injustice of being labelled "at fault." She often had a daydream while running in the woods about standing up in front of a tensely hushed audience and starting her speech thus:*

*"I am a mother and a professional and an erratic wife. I have engaged in borderline and shady relationships. And I am still good. I am here to describe to you how I know this, despite all the doubts and the darkness and the loneliness of this particular margin in which no one has yet turned on the lights. I will speak about it. I will speak about love, because love makes us good. I know some of you will not love me for the things I have to say. Some of you will find your own sense of goodness threatened, but I ask you to engage in dialogue with me and with each other, to explore this margin with me, to meet me here, as bell hooks would say."*

*Keira is a well-known speaker and her latest book has drawn a crowd. People are there to witness the woman who has caused sensation and controversy by talking about adultery and family values in the same breath. That is a place of resistance, a place of radical transformation that reaps its creativity from the physical act of shifting one's gaze while maintaining one's gaze, of holding a position while the ground under each foot is moving, of being willing to hold certain things very close to one's heart while at the same time offering them up as messenger pigeons to fly off and deliver unspeakable news.*

*She talks about what-ifs, capturing the hidden fears of some, offending others' sense of what is right, ethical, acceptable.*

*"How many of you believe that I am standing alone in this margin while you legions of happy people strut your hour of goodness?"*

*Their applause and queue to sign books suggests an answer.*

The writer discovers that there is a delicate imbalance in which she is able to think and write meaningfully and in service to... a better world or a fuller humanity. When she is caught out in the high winds of the hurricane, out of control of her daily movements and emotions, she can sometimes write, but it is seldom and random. When she returns to her corner and pledges to be good, to be organized, to not drink or dream of alternative arrangements in her life, to give up on buying a house and do the boring parts of her job meticulously well - and the "for god's sake how hard can it be to clean up the dishes before I go to bed" voice emerges- ... in this voice she can write, but what emerges is mealy and not quite hot enough. When she doesn't write is when she is beating herself up about other things she is also neglecting, most likely all as a result of being in a margin, on a point of transition that, if harnessed, can be the most creative and revealing place. hooks' place. When she writes from a place of semi-desperation that can glimpse order, when she is almost ready to write but not quite, from that margin is where her voice croaks forth into thirsty darkness.

In "(Re)Presentation and Voice" Tierney (1995) makes a case for broadening the audience for whom researchers write, while at the same time making a plea for "good writing." Tierney exposes the rigidity of science and yet falls short of calling up a compelling juxtaposition with an artistic approach (he does mention the more emotional involvement of qualitative research, but laments that it is often plagued by bad writing). "What about art and the presentational form?" I am asking as I read, expecting to find it in the next paragraph. He calls for a greater variety of styles, as great as in fictional writing, and yet he does not arrive at the point that artistic writing could constitute an antidote to bad writing and serve to reach broader audiences. In the context of this inquiry, I explicitly offer the fictional sections as an artistic approach that in addition to offering different voices, points of view that don't necessarily converge, an exploration into language and emotion and "true life" at the same time as "imagination," are also an attempt to offer respite from academic, logical point-making. The aim is to involve the reader in the more primary, artistic experience of life represented in language. It is an experiment in bringing (more) pleasure back into the academic text.

Gray and Sinclair (2006), in their humorous piece about the grating quality of academic writing, specifically address the dreary landscape of "bad writing" that plagues academic journals, books and conferences. They plead with us -the academic community- to care enough about the quality of our writing and to infuse it with creativity, levity and pleasure.

Writing well or badly presupposes an audience, which begs the question: “to whom am I writing?” I felt answers (or are they questions?) forming at my back, where my spine and back muscles rest against the oversized pillow on the armchair where I sit to write in the early morning. I feel myself squirm under the question and become more drawn to asking *with whom* am I writing, who is behind me, what am I bringing along? I can feel them on my back, both weighing slightly but also supporting me. I quickly think about authors, those whose words contribute to the forming of mine and who are with me as I write and think; and I think of people and experiences that have affected who I am and that I also bring with me, from behind, from the past. Both ballast and bolsters.

I push myself farther down this line of thought (what Bateson might call a “step”: what is ahead of me then on this path? To whom is my voice addressed? Whenever I have fleetingly considered this question (there always seems to be something more pressing and easier to ponder), my father comes up as a knee-jerk answer. And then I think: maybe my mother, or perhaps... maybe it should be my mother. Or my mother through my father? And the exercise becomes muddled. Somewhere there is a true answer, not a constructed, compassionate or filial answer. Nor a compliant, relieving answer either, I suspect.

Another knee-jerk answer, after I don’t find a satisfactory one in the first round, is myself. This of course presents the risk of falling into excessive self-reflexivity, or solipsism. Surely there is something that my work yearns to change in the world, besides my own ways of thinking, acting and theorizing. Am I stubbornly refusing to believe that I am just doing this research for myself?

Tierney (1995) takes Patai’s impatient criticism of so much focus on self-reflexivity as a helpful -if exaggerated- warning and traces “how self-reflexivity has worked its way into textual practice”: essentially, qualitative research in the social sciences got over its little brother syndrome vis a vis positivist research by attempting to write objectively, thus compensating for the lack of hard data with hard, impersonal writing. This was eventually re-examined and dispelled by post-modernism and the crisis of representation, when researchers realized (or admitted) that we cannot extract ourselves from the world we are studying. And here the little brother grew up and was proud to exhibit who he was, without apology. Tierney quotes Michelle Fine and Ruth Behar (Tierney, 1995).



Other early proponents of welcoming the “I” back into textual research practice were constructivists, following on from their postmodernist teachers (Foucault, Barthes, Lacan).

The constructivists gave way and wings to feminist writings and the shift in anthropology towards autoethnography as a textual representation that takes account and responsibility for the researcher’s epistemology. Critical subjectivity in action research builds on all of the above and takes a step further to emphasize the importance of a call to action. This focus on praxis and change is, for action researchers (for Tierney and as I develop my own stance, for me), what serves as the antidote to excessive self-reflexivity. If I am writing and producing research for the sake of positive change in the world, my self-reflexivity is at the service of that change, ostensibly making the work helpful for all of us.

Reason and Marshall (1987) propose that neglecting the personal development aspect of inquiry can block the creativity and full relevance of the work being done by a researcher. They therefore encourage researchers and supervisors to ensure that the inquiry is done “for them” (holding general interest for the public and the advancement of knowledge), “for us” (helping a community of practitioners around a particular set of issues) and “for me” (addressing the personal development needs of the researcher). The third and traditionally neglected aspect, “for me,” can be seen from an existential perspective, a psychodynamic perspective and a transpersonal perspective. (Reason & Marshall, 1987)

Tierney is concerned that we may have gone too far in our attention to what our research is doing “for me.” There is a pendulum swing here, and my own sense is that the pendulum is slowing down, tracing a bit less of an arc and converging on what will doubtless always be a moving target, but one in which academics and practitioners are perhaps less opposed in their positions. Tierney holds up positive change as the trump card to play against the argument that the new qualitative research is too self-involved. He advocates for practical change as a clear purpose, without which both science and philosophy lose their relevance.

I am also writing to those who write, exploring the boundaries of “what is (good) writing?,” to call up Grey & Sinclair (2006). This is also about saying something, about voice and certainly about making the world a better place. Like Tierney, Ellis & Bochner, Reason & Marshall and others, I too

would like to see research and life more integrated. I would like “us” as a research community to be validated in honoring the symbiosis between the two.

I have a wish for people in general to be more fully connected to self, community and planet. I believe this can happen through the practice of presentational knowing and expression. We are too often cut off from what we truly think and feel and so we develop only the muscles that we are told are useful. Our educational system emphasizes our rational muscles (most often limited to memorization). Our sports organizations focus more on competition rather than on general health, connection and wellbeing. Our religious organizations train us to be divisive. And our governments incite cynicism and individualism by condoning corruption and inefficiency. Somewhere there is a “whole being” within each of us that would be free to express its ultimate desire for connection and sustainability if it were trained, coaxed, or even just allowed to tap into its imaginal expression.

The intention of this inquiry is to break the silences that stiffen around us. Some of my autofiction touches on taboos; the work I do in Forum Theatre, described in Part II, encourages people to bring up corporate taboos and question them; my way of writing some parts of this inquiry (artistically) is perhaps breaking an academic or research taboo. Carol Gilligan’s beautifully written piece “Joining the resistance” struck on this theme, present in my own writing, of “breaking” a taboo. Gilligan studies her interactions when teaching girls on the edge of adolescence in whom she finds an outspokenness that is lost when they become women. Her text displays the daring beauty of the girls’ conversations and writings, which she suggests could trace a path towards greater political awareness, voice and action for adult women. (Gilligan, 2011)

This inquiry could be one example of the death of the author-in-unison-with-herself, or of the single voice of the author. By making my reader complicit in uncovering silences and taboos, a multi-layered voice can be heard instead of just one, and one that refracts or preludes the potential voice of the reader. Lyotard announced the end of the grand narrative and the birth of the multiple truths of postmodernism. Perhaps those of us who do research from a plural, multi-vocal stance can devise (or name) the flourishing of research and expression that comes from more than one voice at a time.

## Autoethnography and first-person research

My practice of writing autobiographical fiction (which I have called autobiofiction) was becoming important within this inquiry when I read Ellis & Bochner's (2000) "Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject." I had been coming to the idea that I wanted readers to come along on a journey with me, to experience change and confusion and epiphanies along with me and with my characters. Ellis and Bochner were echoing my thoughts:

"We need a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points that define an autoethnographic project, and consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling." (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 735)

The idea of readers considering the *storyness* of their own lives fits well with the purpose of bringing out voice and expression of participants in Forum Theatre workshops. Just as I would like readers to 'feel' with me, wonder with me, ponder, question, change with my narrative, I hope that workshop participants will do the same through their collective and individual experience of embodying blockage, silence and lack of agency and then working through and around these feelings physically and emotionally within the workshops. The workshops can therefore bring these ideas from the intellectual realm to the practical, in some ways answering the questions that were emerging for me as I finished reading Ellis & Bochner's article. But more on this in Part II.

Ellis & Bochner refer to their writing as evocative narrative:

"The word evocative contrasts the expressive and dialogic goals of this work with the more traditional orientations of mainstream, representational social science: the narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain, stressing the journey over the destination, and thus eclipses the scientific illusion of control and mastery." (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 744)

Writing as a method of inquiry is by nature exploratory. I don't know what I am going to find and the writing leaves a trail of the journey. As I write (particularly in the autobiofictional form), I am

seeking to enter into deeper relationship with myself as well as with my eventual readers in an embodied and holistic way. More than purely intellectual exchange, I find myself striving for change which, as Ellis and Bochner support, is better reached through emotion:

Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 744)

Alongside the ethical dilemmas of writing autoethnography, Sparkes also warns us that the experience and ultimate production of autoethnographical writing is, in a sense, at the will of our bodies. Sparkes describes his failure to produce a promised text because his body was simply not ready to release the story: “I feel these dilemmas deep within my flesh as the story ebbs and flows in my sinews reminding me that knowledge is inevitably of the body and that knowing requires the existence of a body.” (Sparkes 2013: 209) Sparkes’ body acted as an impediment to writing in this case, and yet it is also through heightened consciousness of what he calls the “carnal dynamics involved in the autoethnographic enterprise” that I have surrendered to the text “writing me” to use Winterson’s terms. Haven and Keira emerge from a creative experience that is both physical and imaginal. They “body forth” as Seeley and Reason (2008) put it, a concept I will address in more depth in the section on writing poetry as inquiry.

The autoethnographic stream in social science over the last 20 odd years provides a scholarly backdrop for my use of autofiction as a means of inquiry. Like Sparkes (2013) and Andrews (2014) and Ellis & Bochner (2000), I believe we have a better chance of creating the right environment for reflection and deep change if we engage the storied minds, bodies and emotions of author and readers by inviting them into the felt experience of narrative. The following frames for inquiry reside within the academic “permission” I have taken from the autoethnographic work cited in this section.

## Writing stories as Inquiry

Stories run through this work, like rivers, soaking the terrain with ever changing waters, sometimes as a calming bath and other times as a turbulent whirlpool. The process of inquiry and discovery has followed the path of these stories, as they are both an access point and a result of inquiry.

My relationship with the formal process of capturing and telling stories has not always been smooth. I was once charged with designing and teaching a short class on storytelling within a corporate program. I approached the task somewhat starry-eyed, perhaps as Haven does things, thinking of the grand and precious role she might play in awakening the storyteller in corporate participants. But then... my love of stories was flatly conveyed in these short sessions. I think I managed to endear myself but not to establish myself as a storyteller, story maker, or guide in showing others how to craft and tell stories. It was a blip, a moment of entertainment and distraction, within a larger program on expression, presence and presentation skills. I read through articles on the role of stories in leadership, I watched TED talks and read a book about how to give successful TED talks, I asked friends and colleagues for their advice and material and I put together a combination of basic tenets for storytelling, some fun examples and videos mainly from advertising, and designed a short exercise that was meant to give people a chance to practice and tell their stories to the rest of the group. In general, the feedback was polite. I had the sense that participants appreciated the effort, or perhaps they acknowledged the value of having storytelling as part of the program, but I could tell that essentially the two hours we had spent together was not going to affect their practice as leaders or their being in the world, with few to no exceptions. Neither did these sessions change me, which seems to be an indicator, a mirror check of sorts, as to my investment in and therefore the inherent quality of the effort. So much for that!

Some time after this experience and the subsequent end of my storytelling workshop, Geoff Mead's account of his entry into the world of stories had a revelatory effect on me. Mead's telling of his own story and his general take on the role of stories in our lives and in leadership gave me something to hold onto regarding the role I am giving stories in my emerging theory of change. I was reading the introduction to "Telling the Story" (Mead, 2014) when I could suddenly imagine myself delivering a new workshop on storytelling that actually reaches the souls and fingertips of my audience and indeed my own.

As I am nearing the end of my ADOC experience, I am faced with the challenge of writing/telling this story. I am coming back to the beginning of the process, thinking about what I set out to do, what I longed to change and what has happened and how. My desire in seeking out this doctorate was to attain a more thoughtful, rigorous, studious and informed way of life.<sup>1</sup> A life of reflection, or at least with reflection in it. This is not easy, I am learning, for someone who is essentially active, gregarious and easily distracted. I recognize much of my thinking as valuable and holding quality. But it is often fleeting, swept away by the current of my enthusiastic action and activity, lost in the waves. The value, on a personal level, of this thesis is to attempt to answer the question: how am I achieving the state I set out to find in beginning the doctoral process? I include this discussion here, as I believe it has everything to do with stories and the finding (one of) one's calling(s). I will examine the question through the lens of Mead's work.

Mead talks about making a change in his life towards storytelling, towards a life of narrative and of following vocation. He also discusses being involved or committed to something, citing the joke about bacon and eggs: the chicken is involved, but the pig is committed. I smile to myself, and realize that, other than my motherhood, I have mostly been involved in things. Productively involved, but rarely committed. My class on storytelling, described above, is a perfect example.

*As I finish reading the prologue of "Coming Home to Story", I feel distinct pressure on my chest and a tightening of the throat. I am moved by Mead's genuine "laying out" of what his journey is, what it means for him and its potential impact on the world. It is close to what I feel my own work wanting to do:*

The transformative and soulful journey of becoming a storyteller, such that I now live "laboring in ecstasy," as the poet Yeats puts it, using stories to deepen and perhaps even transform what is possible around me, at the same time as they help me to heal myself. It is a path open to anyone willing to let stories into their souls and put them back out into the world. (Mead, 2011)

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<sup>1</sup> Here I remind myself of the wording I used in the introduction to this work: "I wanted to find intellectual grounding for my practice in design and delivery of leadership development; I wanted a community of curious people with whom I could share, discuss and develop ideas; and I wanted to write and to do so with some purpose."

*I sense a divergence happening between the idea of telling my stories from a reflective, narrative standpoint and using stories and storytelling to engage with the world through the work that I do. My own story is by definition unfolding right now. Am I still too close to some events, to the changes in myself, to write the stories? What happens when I write the outcome, the choices and the pain as they happen or even before they happen? What is the power of these prophecies I build?*

When my work with groups is most meaningful for me (and therefore connects more noticeably with participants) it taps into an imaginal energy. Leading workshops in self-leadership requires me to tell personal stories to bring certain concepts to life, such as connecting with purpose or identifying one's values or barriers to success. Mead reminds me of the theory behind this method when he writes about the physiological level at which the members of a group listening to a speaker are literally "on the same wavelength" as each person receives the sound waves emanating from the speaker. I am reminded that the mixture of commitment and wonder that builds up in workshops, such as "Self Leadership," has to do with the spellbinding effect of being in a group and listening to a good, universal, well-told and touching story. It is a sharing of something and it sets a tone. The importance of this settled in for me as I connected with Mead's questions: "How are you personally involved in the bigger story you are telling? In what ways is your life touched by what you are asking people to do?" (Mead, 2014:148)

If I am almost committed (or at least heavily involved) at this point in my thinking, the memory of Senge's (2006) words bring me even closer to commitment:

Personal mastery (...) is an essential cornerstone of the learning organization. (...) An organization's commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of its members. The roots of this discipline lie in both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, and in secular traditions as well." (Senge, 2006: 7)

Senge's ideas on collective intelligence and the importance of systems speak directly to my nagging question about whether self-leadership and stories make a difference to the world, to the whole, to the meaning of our work and lives. I conclude that stories are a necessary and beautiful way to connect our minds and hearts and make us more than the sum of our parts. Stories generate a "we": a collective ability and concern. And with the existence of that "we" it is possible to sense and

understand the system of which we are a part. As Senge points out, without acknowledging the fifth discipline -which is about the awareness of the systems that hold us-, we cannot integrate the other four disciplines (personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team learning). (Senge, 2006)

I feel relieved because I know intuitively that the universe is “made of stories, not atoms” (quote attributed to Muriel Rukeyser) and that we need “Narrative Leadership” (Mead, 2014) now more than ever for each one of Senge’s five disciplines: we need stories to understand ourselves on our way to personal mastery; we need them to co-create our mental models; we need them to build shared meaning; to engage in the dialogue that is the foundation for team learning; and to conceive of the systems that surround and are intertwined with us.

Molly Andrews’ book on “Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life” has provided reflection and insight into my use of fiction (including theatre) as a vehicle for inquiry. Andrews writes in favor of appealing to our narrative imagination in order to understand the world: “It is our imagination which assists us in synthesizing the information we take in about the world around us, and helps us to process it, looking beyond and beneath what is.” (Andrews, 2014: 11) Through her consideration of magic, ageing, education and political activism, Andrews explores the ways in which narrative imagination addresses our “deep-rooted desire to look over the edge of the boundaries of possible.” (Andrews, 2014: 26) Andrews quotes Sartre’s notion of the “not-yet-real” to display the spatio-temporal fluidity that imagination provides, allowing us to play in the gap between now and then and between what apparently is and what could be, either in the present or in the future. This is an important feature of autofiction in that “personal narratives represent a personal truth, or truths, even if that truth does not coincide with reality.” (Andrews, 2014: 26)

Mead (2014), Senge (2006) and Andrews (2014) have fueled my belief in writing fiction and experimenting with theatre. I am learning that I and the groups I facilitate are better able to discern the systems and patterns that cause our deepest challenges when we approach them from a creative, playful angle and not head on; not from the logico-rational brain, but with our storied brain (Mead, 2014), which is more likely to provide us images of possibility, insight and freedom. Reflecting on stories, systems and narrative imagination provides evidence for me that I am gaining rigor and depth in my thinking and in my practice.



Writing these ideas is a challenge: my voice is challenged, my logico-rational thinking is likely to overshadow my storied brain at times, and yet my heart and soul are grasping at something that I know is there.

### **Writing poems as inquiry**

Writing with mud in your eyes  
Is a tricky endeavor  
And one must be clever  
To see the world with blotches  
More clearly than without

Speaking is tricky amid so much mud  
Words get sticky or land with a thud  
And most cannot see or hear  
How much is muffled inside  
Where terror and tears and silence reside.

These dark wet splotches appear  
More intricate and curious and near  
As the world out beyond fades away  
And the patterns of lacy mud portray  
Scenes of their own messy living,  
Patterns of life as it lands.  
Can I wipe it clean with my hands?

This poem came out of one of the many moments when I felt that I was too close to my own experience to properly inquire and write. Part of the challenge of acknowledging ourselves as part and parcel of our action research is that we renounce the illusion of objectivity. While there is much written about the virtues of letting ourselves into the research, there is less (as far as I have found) on the risks and challenges this more transparent stance produces. Sparkes (2013) addresses the

ethical dilemma of writing social science from an autoethnographic lens: because, as he states “after all, our stories are not our own” (207), we must take measures to protect others and indeed ourselves: “To force a story into being would cause me undue harm.” (209)

I have developed a practice of writing poetry when I am stuck, cannot write meaningfully, or don’t know how to express something without causing undue harm to myself or others. In this section I will show how, sometimes more powerfully than fiction, the medium of poetry provides a means to inquire along an “edge” that Marshall addresses:

I do not, however, want to tell ‘confessional tales’ to no purpose (but they may sometimes be to valuable purposes) or to make myself or others vulnerable. This is an edge which needs awareness, and when we write from inquiry it requires appropriate signaling.  
(Marshall, 1999: 4)

The symbolism of poems allows us to extend our epistemologies while being mindful of the ethical implications of first person action research.

### **Psychodrama**

Psychodrama, like a rash  
Comes crashing back, unbidden.  
Silly me, thinking myself hidden.  
It finds me, walks across my lap  
And settles in beside me  
With a sigh.

Oh hi, I mutter awkwardly.  
I hope you’re not offended  
That our relationship was upended  
You seem so nonchalant...  
Another sigh, a deep groan,  
And it snuggles in to slumber.  
For how long, I wonder?

That is up to me, I see,  
As cozy psychodrama snores,  
Clearly bored by my futile  
Acts of (in)dependence.  
Penance will not serve,  
Nor reasoning, nor momentary nerve.  
Only a firm blow might make it go.

My heart goes still as the creature's breath  
Lengthens and strengthens its sleepy hold  
On our story.  
You have my trust, it seems to say  
As it slips away to dream.  
And does it really seem that I must murder  
This sleeping intruder  
As it purrs?

### **Now alone**

Now alone, I stop.  
Breathe,  
Finding soft textures  
Of singing voices in a distant room.  
Sweet croon, unaware  
Of any faintly listening ear.  
Then there are two,  
Now three, deep honey voices.  
One raises a question  
Another sings a parallel song  
To the first.  
No one hurts.

My children sing throughout the house:  
All day they repay my efforts  
With song.  
How could I wrong them  
With silent betrayal?  
Where will the song find notes  
When winter coats are gone,  
Hung somewhere foreign  
With cold stone floors  
The inner sanctum inside these doors  
Blown out by violent wind?  
How long can I barricade,  
Keep out the shade  
Of night that will surround  
Our hearts like a layer  
Of cold air  
And so keep up the fight?

### **Edges**

I walk right up to edges:  
Confident, drawn, mistress of my fear  
And my limbs drawn carefully near.  
I pause as if to jump,  
Gather strength and bend my knees,  
Smile at the crowd  
And freeze.

This is the wrong jump  
The false leap  
The shaky proposition:  
A junk heap of false intentions  
Masquerading as love.

Which way to jump?  
If not in the old worn ways  
Of my favorite leather boots  
that know the ways and smells  
And cobbled dwellings of old days,  
Then true love must be in the cold, new, modern cut  
Of crispy mirth and sparkling touch.

How can I let go so much?

### **On writing poetry**

Writing poems takes me into a reflective, creative mode in which I am able to operate without the usual supervision of my conscious, rational brain. It's a liminal state, I would say, because it is also not entirely free-wheeling, unconscious and beyond control, such as a dreaming state might be; I am aware of treading carefully and am guided by a sense of quality. This sense is aesthetic: it is concerned with the accuracy of images and symbols, the truthfulness, the precision and the proper distilling of emotions. It is a sense of rightness for me, unfettered by societal approval or checking of content. I can allow myself full expression, expect it even, as long as the result is poetically appealing in some way. "Does it convey my emotion to the best of words' ability?" is one of the criteria with which I write poetry. Therefore, it is neither conscious/rational nor unconscious. It is a bridge between the two. Bolton writes:

"The process of writing required of the poet takes the writer into hitherto unexpressed and unexplored areas of experience, in a way only very skilled psychotherapy/analysis or the other arts therapies can. The writing of poetry can also effectively be used to examine issues the writer knows are problematic but does not want to talk about." (Bolton, p 119)

The unexpressed and unexplored emerges, "bodies forth" as Seeley & Reason (2008) put it: "Bodily forth is the fruit of suspension, which may be spontaneous, or it may be a combination of

spontaneity and planning.” (Seeley & Reason 2008: 16) Suspension, in Seeley and Reason’s work, is the second in a four-step sequence that leads to the use of presentational knowing (Heron and Reason, 1997) in our lives. The first step is sensuous encountering, a way of experiencing with greater awareness of our senses. The second is suspension, which puts our knee-jerk intellectual response muscle on hold. The third, bodying forth, is the imaginative expression that emerges. And the fourth, being in-formed, is a way of being that results from the first three elements. The writing of a poem, the “putting pen to paper” as I wrote in a recent poem (see below), constitutes the bodying forth and is the only physical act in the sequence described by Seeley and Reason.

Pen to paper, I tell myself.  
Write it down, or up or through or out.  
A buzzing phone disturbs my hand  
A band plays in my mind.  
A walk in nature might suit better  
Today, to connect body, soul and hand.  
Body forth, Body out, come through,  
I say.

Maybe last night’s wine is in the way?

But the thing, the crux, it will not out.  
I shake and push and wait.  
Such creatures I have birthed before  
Some easily, some bloody and late.  
But this?  
It latches onto places, clinging to my walls  
It becomes one with its host  
And will not move at all.

Not ready yet, I tell the doc  
But when?, the world cries out.  
Forever is too long to wait

For the thing, the crux  
That will not out.

I have never seen its little face,  
Its parentage unknown, ungraced  
With stats on size and vital signs.  
How long has baby been inside?  
And when did you conceive?

Already I grieve a death, my shame.  
I hope somehow we both remain.  
Still birth such a waste  
A mother dead, a loss of face  
To perish both a noble end  
The life of both a change of plot  
Heretofore unseen.

The physical writing of poetry is itself an act of discovery. I can be as surprised as a potential reader at the form and meaning the poem takes on. First there is my hand, writing, and the sound of the words as they fall on the page and ring in my ear. Then the words, in sound and now meaning, connect to the unconscious: symbols resonate, unreasoned, with deeper parts of the self. Following this inward journey there is an awareness outward of my expression: I become aware of what I am saying and of its specific weight and truth. Finally, I sense the chance of an offering: will I share this poem? And have I said something to myself and/or to some other(s) that is of import? What is its fate?

This “sequence of four events” that lead, in my experience, to the creation of an artistic or presentational expression can be classified into four phases of writing poetry:

1. **Bodying forth** (Seeley & Reason, 2008) includes the physical action of my hand writing and the sound of the words in my ear (I most always write poetry long hand, pen to paper). Seeley and Reason’s analysis described above holds firm, as just arriving at this point of

bodying forth requires the previous conditions of sensuous experiencing and suspension. Now that I am indeed committing the presentational act, I am bodying forth. I have poetically arrived. I want to dwell on the physical nature of bodying forth, as our bodies are often overlooked in this (and many other) of our writing and researching processes.

MC Richards, an American artist and teacher, says about painting: “I am not doing it because of any visual effect. I’m doing it because there is something about that motion that is calling me.” (Kane 2003 in Seeley & Reason, 2008) As she speaks in Kane’s video “The Fire Within,” in her peaceful, almost metered speech, she mimics the graceful motion of painting with her hands. Her sensuous sound and movement seem an art form in themselves and I sense that Mary Caroline (Richards) is an in-formed being. She is, in form and content, an artful representation (or performance) of her inner life.

Early on in this inquiry, I began doing yoga every morning as a way to prepare my body and mind to read and write in the early morning, before spouse and children and pets and coworkers began to tug at my attention. It turned out that early morning was not the best time for me to read and write, but the yoga remains. The physical movement in the morning of my semi-conscious body prolongs and softens the liminal waking of my mind. My breath connects me to myself and my quiet surroundings and I enter differently into the business of the day. Those around me have noticed a change in my pace and expression since the yoga took hold. It has helped me to acknowledge and listen to the knowing in my body: if I have not slept well or am anxious about the day ahead, my quicker breath will tell me so; I will have a harder time focusing inward because thoughts of tasks and problems to solve elbow their way in; I come back to my breathing, greeting my anxiety and make a deal with it to hold fire, for just a few minutes; I am aware, I have a relationship with my worry, it has not taken over. I am building a physical foundation of awareness “with a sensuous, erotic, curious, playful and emotional engagement with experience” creating my own “rich compost to work with, as such foundational experience begins to quicken into response.” (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 18) The bodying forth I find in yoga is found again in the emerging physical scratch of pen on paper in writing poetry.



The sound of the words as they fall is a nearly simultaneous but subsequent physical experience. The “polyrhythmic sounds, speech in its first endeavors” as Adrienne Rich (1993) describes what poetry is made of, have a prior-to-meaning physical ring that either falls with intention or must be changed. The sound either flows, in whatever style or mood I am bodying forth, or it grinds. My ear, more than my thinking brain, will grasp for another choice. This can happen as a poem emerges and also in reading and revising. But it is always primarily a physical, aural experience and choice. Gillie Bolton, in her treatment of the therapeutic power of poetry, writes: “Poetry is an exploration of the deepest and most intimate experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas: distilled, pared to succinctness, and made music to the ear by lyricism.” (Bolton, 1999: 120)

Bodying forth therefor, in the case of writing poetry, is the physical experience of writing and hearing one’s words emerge. There are certainly other ways of going about writing poetry and many other ways to body forth. This account of my own process of creating poems offers a way to think about writing poetry. It is also a revealing way to body forth as it leaves a trace of our passing from sensuous experiencing, through suspension and into the body’s response. (Seeley & Reason, 2008)

2. **Building a bridge to the unconscious** happens through the symbolic nature of poetry. Bolton is referring to symbols when she points out the specific power of poetry to connect with “complex emotional and mental happenings,” or, in other words, with our unconscious: “An idea, emotion, feeling or thought is not presented in the abstract – but as a concrete, graspable entity. The power of poetry lies partly in this, both to the writer and the reader.” (Bolton, 1999: 120) The concrete, graspable entities are the symbols of poetry which by creating a specific image give the abstract feeling or emotion a signifier. In this way, poetry can use the connection with the unconscious through symbols, just as traditional healing therapies use other means of tapping into the unconscious. Seeley quotes Bateson on the creation of a bridge between conscious and unconscious, with regards to being open to the entire process of presentational knowing:

There are bridges between one sort of thought (intellectual) and the other (emotional) and it seems to me that the artists and poets are specifically concerned

with these bridges. It is not that art is the expression of the unconscious, but rather that it is concerned with the relation between the levels of mental process... Artistic skill is the combining of many levels of mind -unconscious, conscious and external- to make a statement of their combination. (Bateson 2000: 470 in Seeley & Reason, 2008: 7)

Bolton points out that, as a therapeutic practice, poetry can be especially useful in liminal or transitional periods such as adolescence, birth and death. (Bolton, 1999) Writing poetry offers a way to dwell on this bridge between our conscious and unconscious knowing, a liminal state suspended by symbols. I pay more attention, particularly as a poem first emerges, to the images that are symbolic representations of feelings and emotions than to their meaning. A later reading and revision might prompt me to sharpen or refine these images, but the initial mark persists, not as a rational comparison or deliberate metaphor, but as an emergent symbol that comes from a physical, bodily knowledge rather than rational thought. Sparkes reflects Uotinen's suggestion that "it is possible to know without knowing and that unbeknown knowledge is first and foremost of the body." (Sparkes, 2013: 209). In the presentational act of writing poetry, I "become more deeply acquainted with the responses to experience of our more-than-brainy bodies to the more-than-human world". (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 19)

3. **Awareness of expression** happens as I emerge from the physical and unconscious dwelling of writing a poem. In Seeley and Reason's terms, this is where I begin to be in-formed, that is, the meaning of the poem shows me something new about an emotion or feeling or event and my deep connection to it: "The writing of poetry profoundly alters the writer because the process faces one with oneself." (Bolton 1999: 118) I become aware of the process of writing changing me at a deep level: "An issue clarified into words, graphically visualized, and controlled by poetic form is an issue on the way to being dealt with." (Bolton: 120)

Seeley and Reason ask: "How will our senses get to know (*connaître*) the wider, deeper world? We are seeking to enrich, not to impoverish the sensory ground of our being." (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 19) And further:

“If we are in-formed largely by two-dimensional emails, Cartesian thought processes, planning, time management and report writing, then how are we ever going to develop and grow our own sensory and emotional capacity to respond to the more than human world in any way other than more reports, emails and abstraction?” (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 19)

By writing poetry, I become aware of the physical process and subsequent observation of my expression. This awareness keeps me in-formed, connected to my multi-dimensional self and indeed to the rest of the world I inhabit. Poetry provides me with a relatively gentle entry into difficult territory: “The writing hand not only seems to know what the thinking mind does not, but also knows how much that mind, as well as the feeling heart, can bear to face.” (Bolton: 121) I can tell when a poem is looking at something askance, not able yet to face it squarely, to bring it into full focus. The very act of approximation that poetry can afford is in itself a process, making series of poems important as a marked pathway to knowing. The gradual coming into focus, or the graphic acknowledgement of a lack of focus both offer awareness, dialogue with my inner being and learning. All of this forms part of being in-formed and of helping us “to be responsible for the kinds of experiences with which we populate our living” and thus for “our responses to the world.” (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 10)

4. **The chance of an offering** presents itself as a personal choice. If the self-revelatory process of writing poetry can help me be in-formed and therefore improve the quality of my actions in the world, then there is a chance that by offering the expression to specific others or to others in general, I could affect in-formation of our communities that Seeley and Reason are arguing for as the ultimate reason to be in-formed through presentational knowing: “If we perceive through experiential knowing, and we create through presentational knowing, we are interested in how this perceiver-creator interplay is imperative if we are to care for ourselves, our societies and our planet.” (19) If we are in-formed through the process of presentational knowing we can “consciously become better acquainted with our earthly home and its inhabitants such that our part of the living dialogue of planetary process becomes more generative and restorative than destructive.” (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 19) The offering to others of poems I have written not only models one way of engaging in

presentational knowing but engages the reader or receiver through a possible connection with their own process of bodying forth. The reading of a poem by others, the poet hopes, creates yet another bridge, this time perhaps to the collective unconscious and, as Seeley and Reason allude to, the eco-psychology of our planet.

It feels risky to share our poetry: "Poetry can be a focus for intense and fruitful discussion with the right reader or group. This reader must be chosen with care: a relative or lover may well be the wrong choice." (Bolton, 1998: 122) And yet the very broaching of delicate subjects, of silences "that needed to be overcome," is in itself an opportunity for deep dialogue and connection. The more we behold and enter into dialogue with and about art (presentational knowing), the less risk we run of staying caught in the two-dimensional world of reports and emails against which Seeley and Reason warn us.

I continue to struggle with the decision to let others read my poetry. What if it says too much? What if it is misunderstood, or understood better than expected? The most difficult question I face is: what if my reader interprets this as my ultimate truth instead of the presentational expression of a moment? What if, instead of it being seen as *one way* in which I experience the world, it is taken as *the way*? What if my embodied expression reveals me and thus binds me into a corner and will not let me out?

### **An exercise in framing poetry**

Recently a friend whom I trusted to read some poems encouraged me to engage in framing some of the poems I had sent.

Blank page

Symbolic act, I tell myself:

Body sluggish, tummy loose

Neck and arms joined by gravity.

The gravity and the levity at once, said MC.

Mary Caroline, the meeting point of up and down

Making mystics of us all, she said.  
She found peace in that green mossy glade,  
Her people needy, silent and noisy in their bubble of single-channel consciousness.  
Not like us, special, conscious perhaps in other ways.  
Her smile and her wrinkles blossom as she talks.  
Where will I dwell in my slower days?  
What will fill my heart, prick my pain, move memories,  
Give me the gravity and levity to move  
With grace?  
MC has a pace, a cadence, dancing, turning, settling down  
To rise again and flit and rest,  
A gingko leaf, attune to sounds from underneath.

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Volume

I suddenly saw  
- Finally-  
Like a house in the sun on a hill  
The possibility of happiness  
Of rolling laughter, complicity, simplicity  
With you.

The volume of you speaks to me  
Severely as of late.  
The width and breadth of hate  
Crashing through connection.  
The image imposes,  
Comes forth upon me.  
I recoil.

But then that volume holds so much.

Not lithe, not flexible or nimble,  
But a fortress holding riches  
From the past, heavy old things  
That last and carry through  
To serve a teetering future.

A friend and co-inquirer, with whom I have shared the ins and outs of being stuck (in writing and in living), encouraged me to frame the poems (“tell the story around them”) and to consider how they fit in to the inquiry and/or how they help to position me as the inquirer.

The first poem, “Symbolic Act,” is about starting the writing practice, getting unstuck and following a line of inquiry that is loosely held and full of curiosity. The first three lines reflect the physical practice of getting going. By writing some words, any words that come to mind, I connect, through my writing fingers, to the deeper currents of my consciousness. I find then, looking through that keyhole that my fingers delineate on the page, clumsily perhaps, that my mind and soul are quietly inquiring within. I free-fall write (Turner-Vesselago, 2013) into thoughts about MC Richards, an artist I had been reading about in Seeley and Reason’s article on presentational knowing (2008). The authors quote one of Richards’ poems (Seeley & Reason, 2008: 10) and cite Kane’s 2003 video about her. I had just a day or two before been following this thread, intrigued by the work and character of Richards. I was most captivated by her voice and hand gestures in the video, the way her wrinkled face, still pretty in a slightly rugged high-cheek-boned way, seemed to form words that arrived just in time to join her hands in making a thought. She performed an emergent dance about life, art and being.

Richards found her artful expression in painting. I am drawn by her description of the motion of her hand in painting. It reminds me of what happened in this poem: I wrote and words flowed from my writing them. It was a movement calling me, a sound, an invitation, not a thought. Richards speaks in Kane’s video about human consciousness being the juncture of gravity and levity, just where they join, which, she says, makes mystics of us all. I am seduced by this image of tension between up and down, so much akin to the creative tension that produces a dance or a song or a poem. It is also descriptive of the emotion we might feel when witnessing art.

The poem then follows my mind into Richards' life as a secluded teacher for mentally disabled people. She lived with them and taught them, listening with more than just her ears to what they had to express about living. She seems to have found peace and accomplishment in this. And so... I wonder where I will be when my wrinkles proliferate. Will I have found that place? Will I be able to radiate peace and find accomplishment in my life's chapters? Will my body and my words flow with the satisfaction of a life well lived? Will I have given what I could? It is clear to me that I admire Richards in what she has found and how she is able to express herself, and yet I wonder at her ability to have a world so small: a patch of green and wooded land in a corner of New England, largely unnoticed, surrounded by her disabled companions. Her beauty lies in the amalgam of her worldliness and her satisfaction with a world so small.

In the last line I picture a falling gingko leaf, graceful and unpredictable. I like the sound of "gingko" in my ear and I remember a poem my husband wrote, decades back, about a gingko tree.

"Volume" is about my partner. Our marriage has been shaken these past years by a combination of shifting ground and stormy skies. For the sake of protection, I will write metaphorically about our relationship and mainly about the energy in me that gave rise to this poem. It is a hopeful piece for me.

#### *A frame of sorts*

*After ceaseless rain and crashing lightning, a clearing in the clouds let shine, if only for a moment, the promise of better weather on its way. The sun began to dry things out and through the rising steam I could see flowers pushing through, stronger than they were before, though tentative. The shutters had fallen off the house. The cat had run away. The rumbling continued in the distance, getting closer now again. And all the rooms in the house smelled damp, soaked to their core. Through days and nights of battering rain, thunder, crashing seas taking pieces of the dock down on the shore, I cowered in the house. I would not venture out. Nor could I leave, you see, not me. This is my place, I told the rescue teams. This is where I belong. And who would stay and prop things up, make patches, if I left? New leaks sprung daily but I stopped them up, waiting for sun. The quakes, they say, were in my head. The wind had made me mad. But how, then, did the banister break and the lampshades fall? And why did I fall out of bed?*

*The ray of sunshine gave me hope, despite its fleetingness. I knew, quakes or no, that new rain and lightning lay close behind. I was not blind. But a flash of sun came through for me to give me courage, see me through. I lifted sand bags again with purpose and I also stopped to think. I did not rage against the storm now, with tears and banging fists; I seemed prepared to let it rage instead. Dry weather was ahead.*

*The smell would never go away, I knew. The sand would blow about for years. But shutters could be mended and the house would be safe again soon. Would the cat come back? It's hard to know, but I will keep his dish.*

The poem takes me from a ray of sunshine to the consciousness of more storms coming. I weigh up the storms and their damage and see both pain and beauty in the scars they have left. The future is uncertain, the cat has not appeared, but the havoc of these storms will be a part of whatever comes next. The house feels weakened but with care I might be able to make it last.

There is an important physicality about this poem for me. The volume, a person's specific space they occupy, looms large and heavy in the face of the storm. It is unclear yet to me, as I write this parallel story, whether that volume might help or hurt the house in the end.

I suspect much depends on the cat.

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The poems I have tried to explicate point me to consider the following: in "Blank Page" my anxieties around heroic accomplishment, old age, physical beauty and soulful existence; in "Volume" my hope that new human connection is arriving and my more tentative hope that it will deliver happiness.

As I have pointed out, writing poetry as a method of research allows me to access and express a symbolic layer of my world view. This is useful for me to gain insight into myself and, I argue, is useful to the reader on at least two levels: to gain perspective about me as the researcher and



narrator; and to have a potentially self-revelatory experience of a piece of artful expression or presentational knowledge.

Explicating or framing the poems is useful as an exercise, but I do not find that the straight explication adds to the inquiry. On the contrary, it may truncate a more felt relationship between the poem and the reader. The second framing -the metaphorical explication of “Volume”- feels more useful in that it further explores the symbolism and metaphors that are important to this writer and to the inquiry.

Getting to the truth within myself or dissolving confusion around my intentions cannot be a straightforward path. When I am following my characters, I sometimes feel myself under attack by my intellect and judgment muscle. My way through this challenge has been to write into certain situations and emotional states through poetry. The raw emotional and aesthetic priorities that I find more accessible through writing poems have proven an effective way of relaxing my critical thinking and allowing my more liberating, intuitive and creative capabilities to take the lead, stretching me towards a more extended epistemology.

### **Inquiring through dreams**

So far I have described my journey through experimenting with and theorizing about creative, imaginal practices that have opened pathways for me to become more open to change. In my own personal journey, I have done this through writing fiction and poetry. In Part II I will share the work I have done with groups of business executives through improvisational theatre techniques and staging plays in the style of Forum Theatre. But first, as a final frame in my first-person inquiry and a bridge to the collective symbolism of theatre, I will recount my entry into dreams and what Jung called “active imagination.” I will describe my work with dreams and active imagination in the context of Jungian psychology and the work of Robert Johnson (1986). I will then relate working with the unconscious to my general theory of tapping into imagination to make change happen.

Following Johnson’s guidance, I have explored connecting with my unconscious, first through recording and interpreting my dreams and then through active imagination. In order to enter into

active imagination, Johnson describes the role of the psychopomp (Greek for “spiritual guide”) in leading us into the world of our unconscious where we can interact with the different energies and personalities that live there. The figure of psychopomp has emerged in some sense in the autofiction that makes its way into this inquiry in the form of Haven and Keira: they inhabit my imaginal world; they develop circumstances, thoughts and actions as they live both in me and alongside me.

The following active imagination exercise is one of several that I recorded, following Johnson’s instruction to return to the same place in my active imagination. I have imagined this and similar journeys while sitting on a train, walking, or lying in bed. It requires almost full attention, so I would not do it while driving, for example. It leaves me a bit haunted by a place and a puzzle that feels close and palpably real.

*I am walking around a lake. I can’t see the water. There is a wall between the path I am walking and the water. In some places, where the path rises over a small hill, I think I might be able to just see over the wall and catch a glimpse of the shining lake, but I cannot. There are no trees close enough to the wall to climb, no rocks to stand on. And so I walk, imagining the water behind the stones, lapping gently and remembering what it looked like when I saw it, so many years ago. I had been here before, with all my tiny children, walking around the lake and feeding the swans. But that was before the wall was built.*

*It’s about half a mile around. Not far at all, but far enough to feel the distance as I start my third lap. I am just walking, sending energy inward, towards the water, wondering what dwells in there, what is visible, what is alive. Perhaps there is another me circling through the water, swimming, getting out to rest on an island, trying to understand why there is no way out. I don’t know. I can’t see her. When I am frustrated and feel the futility of going around in circles, I focus more on the stone wall. It is old-looking, older than it should be, with moss growing on it in the shadiest spots. The rock is grey with white specks and the surface is rough, porous, almost crumbly. I touch it with my fingers. It is hard and cold and solid, very rough to the touch. I kick it to see if it budes or releases sand or something. But it does not. It just stands. So I keep walking, trying to take my mind off the physical wall and figure out what is being kept beyond it. Is it full of water? Is there a drought? If it is full, is it just water or is there something else? I think about living near water and how that has drawn me*

*in the past. I love a view of water. I fantasize about being alone in a small cabin or house on the water where I write and think and even fish. I subsist and thrive, isolated but somehow connected to life. I am me.*

*What is inside the wall? Is there a small dwelling in there for me? Do I feel confined in my lake dwelling or am I protected in there, from the other parts of me that fly wild and far? Does it keep me safe and focused on its shimmering surface, letting me dive in if I like, taking some fish when I need and sleeping near the cool smell of its reeds and lily pads? I am hidden from curious eyes, I swim all day and then climb out, letting my body emerge and make my evening meal. Whom do I talk to? My mind comes back outside and I just see walls again. It's time for me to go. I have another whole life a few blocks away, where people wait and want and tire. I leave my wall and lake behind, casting a last glance over my shoulder as I pick up the pace towards home. The sun will set soon. The light will dance on the dark water and quickly fade behind the rock wall.*

Johnson describes two main types of characters that appear in our dreams: archetypal characters that come from “the characteristic patterns that pre-exist in the collective psyche of the human race” (Johnson, 1986) and characters that represent some part of ourselves that is requiring expression through our unconscious. The latter can show up as people who exist in our lives, or as unknown characters. Both the archetypal and the representational characters are symbols. Johnson conveys that, based on Jung’s extensive discoveries about the role of dreams in our lives, dreams are the realm of the symbolic, where images and attitudes express themselves, often in disguise.

I have not had dreams about Haven and Keira. For over a year of this inquiry I recorded my dreams and, though they were not terribly frequent, some were vivid and frightening. I believe if I were to dream about my fictional characters, Haven would be a representational character, standing in for an aspect of me, and Keira would be archetypal, though still bearing references to my own self. Haven and Keira belong more to an active imagination exercise than to my dreams. The result of exploring this frame of dreams is that by opening up an even more symbolic territory than stories and poetry, and one that is beyond my willful crafting in many ways, I have become open to narratives that are hidden even from me, the dreamer/storyteller/writer. I have broadened my options. The purely “real,” in terms of my eco-psychological choices, is only one of several possibilities.

Haven and Keira and I all seek the possibility of paths beyond what convention can offer us. Not always looking at problems head on, not proclaiming clearly and boldly about solutions, not tackling challenges with action but first playing with stories about them, engaging intuition and creativity and symbols... these are not the ways of the hero and neither are they the ways of the meta-narrative (Lyotard, 1979). In leaving the meta-narrative behind, we might have seen a Post-heroic woman find her form in the imaginal panoply of this work. I see myself stretching, extending my own epistemology, that of my characters and hopefully my reader's too. I see us "doing epistemology," much as Butler contends that we "do" rather than "have" gender. (Butler, 1990) It is a performance and performance needs practice.

## Chapter Four

### Pause and Transition to Part II

We began with stories of Haven and Keira emerging as a method of first person inquiry. I then explained the Big Theory that provided an expansive context for this work, followed by the Granular Theory that contributed to my construction of method and epistemological consciousness. During the course of inquiry these three phases often happen simultaneously: I am writing or thinking about Haven or Keira, I am sitting in the eco-psychological context that invited me to do such work and I am using an idea derived from Belenky or Richardson or Johnson or Seeley as my method of inquiry in this moment. The feeling is that of walking a line between the grand and the granular.

In trying to think about how I unite the grand and the granular, I am aided by Capra's description of the shaman's work:

It is not by sending his awareness out beyond the natural world that the shaman makes contact with the purveyors of life and health, nor by journeying into his personal psyche; rather, it is by propelling his awareness laterally, outward into the depths of a landscape at once both sensuous and psychological, the living dream that we share with the soaring hawk, the spider, and the stone silently sprouting lichens on its coarse surface. (Capra, 1997: 10)

The sensuous, in Capra's study of Balinese shamans, is the divine or supernatural: for me, the grand. He explains that in tribal cultures, in which subjects are connected to the earth and are not solely anthropocentric, there is a place, occupied most prominently by the shaman, for a kind of awareness that journeys outward and inward (and laterally) at the same time. Capra's description of the shaman's space is reminiscent of the way that stories (in this first part of the thesis) and theatre work (coming up in Part II) walk along the knife's edge of the granular and the grand. These methods draw from imaginal transcendence but are carried out physically in humble interpretation: they touch the ground.

Drawing on the lateral landscape of what is going on, both sensuously and psychologically, this multi-layered awareness is what has made it possible for me to develop an inquiring (and writing) life (Marshall, 1999):

It involves seeking to maintain curiosity, through inner and outer arcs of attention, about what is happening and what part I am playing in creating and sustaining patterns of action, interaction and non-action. (Drawing on systemic analysis I might then, for example, explore what is motivating how I keep things the same or how to expand my behavioural and goal flexibility.) It also involves seeking to pay attention to the 'stories' I tell about myself and the world and recognising that these are all constructions, influenced by my purposes and perspectives and by social discourses which shape meanings and values. (Marshall, 1999: 2)

I still get a tinge of stage fright when Haven, disguised as a cursor, blinks at me, naked, with nothing around her. I am aware of my delusion that when I get my life under control, I will have the space and time to write and be scholarly. The words and ideas will flow and gel and paint in swirling coherence to dazzle my readers, colleagues, friends and family. Under this delusion is the deeper delusion that at that juncture of peace and intellectual perspective, the ideas that emerge from my pretty good brain will be pure, helpful and important. I will shed light on things and the form and content of my text will reflect the epistemology of a woman who is clever, knowledgeable, humble, directed and on to something of real value for the world. In a recent doctoral workshop, my colleague Jim, who is researching legacies, asked us all to depict what we wanted our doctoral legacies to be. What do we want our colleagues, examiners, friends and families to say about our doctorates?

Both the personal and collective aspects of my inquiry converge around the theme of *preparing* to change, almost in the sense of a rehearsal. As change seems to require breaking rules, breaking molds, being bold and wandering into not knowing, the practice of autofiction allows me to play with possible change just as the performative practices in Part II allow individuals and groups to test change in a "safer" environment than "real" life. I/we thus further ourselves along the developmental spectrum to the point of Belenky's (1987) procedural or constructed knowers, where we encounter more readiness for self-challenge, creativity and change. Increased or extended agency holds a promise for me and for "us" in organizational contexts. The present work offers

“inner and outer arcs of attention” (Marshall, 1999: 4) through writing and play-acting that resemble Sartre’s “not-yet-real” but possible worlds. (Andrews, 2014)

In Part II of this inquiry I explore and develop theories about my work with others in the context of organizations. In his wry and thought-provoking counter-textbook on organization theory, Grey debunks the notion of change management, referring to “the fetish of change” (Grey, 2013: 89) and deeming it a failed battle in a nonexistent war: he contends that the common war cry that we are experiencing unprecedented change is a fallacy, as change has historically always been (and felt) fast and furious; and furthermore, that our organizations’ habit of implementing change program after change program is proof of their failure. Grey attributes this failure to the common current misconception that we are in a post-bureaucratic era in which individuals are more valuable than the organization and therefore can and must act out of choice rather than coercion.

While I take on board the notion that culture management may be a more manipulative form of hierarchical imposition and that change management follows the same tenet of “brainwashing” employees for the profit of the organization and its top executives, what I find missing from Grey’s disdainful treatment of change is that real people in real jobs and lives feel the pressure and halting sputters of the world changing around them, whether this is an age-old or new phenomenon. Change management as a field and practice may serve organizations as much as bureaucracy did and does, but change itself presents us with an eco-psychological hurdle which demands adaptation. The current state of the world (as I write this North Korea is performing more nuclear tests close to Chinese waters) is neither peaceful nor secure nor sustainable, all of which translates into enormous risk to organizations and individuals, not to mention our planet. To write off change as a “fetish,” despite how much it may have been used as a rallying cry for maximizing profit, seems to me to overlook the looks in the eyes of so many people walking through life, work, companies, classrooms, etc. Grey is extremely enlightening (and entertaining) on the history of organization theory, though I am left with the sense that the people doing the work in organizations could use ways to approach change. I have carried out my inner and outer arcs of inquiry, holding the assumption that organizational and personal change affect the lives of many. I hold Grey’s healthy skepticism in one hand and my own and others’ lived experiences in the other.

In Part I, I have explored my own readiness to change things through writing stories about two women, two possible versions of myself, and letting the characters develop, claim their existence and take my thinking into imaginal realms that open up new possibilities. Haven and Keira expand my thinking and dreaming and take me into places and situations that I may never have considered consciously or been brave enough to explore and express. I am allowing them to take the helm, to show me where they wish to go. They are raw, emergent and unpredictable. The characters and stories emerge from a constellation of expansive ideas about our world, which I explored in the chapter on Big Theory, as well as from a series of methods and dialogues with those methods which I laid out in the chapter on Granular Theory. Moving forward, taking both the grand and the granular and delving further into spaces for action and performance, I will share my discoveries and experiences with taking an extended epistemology into my work.



## PART II

### Performance Theory and Practice as a Radical Approach to Change

Much as Butler tells us that we “do gender” rather than have it, Grey suggests that we “do organization theory” whether we are aware of it or not, and furthermore, our doing theory is “ultimately inseparable from wider political and social issues.” (Grey, 2013: 16) Grey’s analysis of organization theory provokes the following questions for Part II of this inquiry: What happens (or has happened) when I extend the notions and findings of my first-person inquiry into the work I do with others? Or more specifically, what happens when I follow my own recommendation to tap into imagination, physical commitment and relationality for the purpose of change and/or development in organizations?

Grey prompts me to think about my own theory of organizational change in terms of what my agenda(s) might be: I develop theory by observing practice as I experience it; theorizing helps me to understand what makes the practice the way it is (because I already espouse a constructivist view, I am also aware of what makes the practice the way it is *for me*, that is, I try to remain aware of my own participation in and perspective on my practice); if I have taken the time and effort to theorize, it must be because there is something about the practice that gets my attention, either because it is far better than everything else I experience, or because it is worse and needs fixing; and here I arrive at Grey’s point, which is essentially that I am compelled to theorize because something in the world needs to change. Once I have worked out the theory based on the practice, my agenda will likely reveal itself to me.

In the case of starting to practice performance methods in leadership development programs, the progression went something like this:

- I observe that we expose participants to a lot of words and not very much action, practice, physical involvement or imaginative stimulus
- I want (have an agenda) to create something experiential, physical and creative because I think this will provide a more intense experience and help people develop more and better (and I will find the work more fun and more compelling)

- I talk with my closest colleagues and two of us come up with the idea of a theatre workshop
- We start running workshops and they are a great success with participants
- I experience some trouble in communicating why theatre workshops are valuable and why they should not be cut back to a reduced version in order to once again spend more time delivering words and concepts alone
- I become pitted against colleagues who can't find the time or interest to understand the theatre workshops despite their success with participants
- I continue to run workshops, often in a reduced format, and success continues
- I start to theorize about the conflict the theatre workshops create as well as their success in terms of learning for participants.
- I am beginning to be able to articulate a deeper theory about using theatre to access the more covert and problematic aspects of organizational life, which is not necessarily something the organization wants to see revealed, even to themselves.
- At the same time, a similar theory emerges from my first-person inquiry using fiction and poetry to explore deeper, hidden parts of myself: I resist some personal revelations about myself in similar ways to the above point about organizations resisting risky revelations about their underlying assumptions.
- I continue to do theatre work with Brian within Telefonica and develop a dialogue with him about the work itself, the dynamics of doing it together and his role in my ADOC research, forming the basis of my second person inquiry.

Grey helps me to clarify the relationships between my practice, my theory and my (and others') agenda(s). In uncovering my own agenda, I am able to further understand those of others and of the organization, which often explains the conflict and discomfort that arises when I engage in the performative activities described in this thesis. There emerges a need for a theory about the work I do -the practice itself- and for another contextual theory about how that sits in a wider, organizational and societal context. Part II of this thesis will delve into the theory and practice of how people in organizations may benefit from approaching difficult topics with a playful approach and an extended epistemology. The contextual theory about change is that the organization, or certain authorities in it, will try to resist that approach because it necessarily carries on without pre-

determined agendas, giving the agenda-making power to “the people,” i.e. the participants or, as Grey would classify them, the managed.

In his stance as “critic,” Grey is very clear about the negative aspects of an organization theory that does not hand over the agenda-making power to the managed:

Much organization theory is very closely allied to management practice. It too pursues a particular agenda. It is an agenda which incorporates and validates all kinds of assumptions about organizations, of course, but also about people, politics, and ethics -about, in short, how the world we live in is organized. I think (...) that it does so in a way which is flawed, highly partial, largely indefensible, and both morally and practically wrong. (Grey 2013: 16)

When we engage in organizational learning that is open-ended, meaning that the outcome of the learning is not pre-determined because it emerges from participants (not from an organizational or managerial agenda), we are able to begin circumventing the problematic assumptions usually present in organization theory and therefore in most management education programs. The unpredictability of learning outcomes frees the activity from a pre-conceived agenda. This is also what makes it challenging to communicate with stakeholders, who want to know what the “take-away’s” will be. If they cannot check the take away’s, they cannot align the learning with any particular agenda. Andrews voices her concern regarding her son’s education being driven by “learning objectives”: “I was not then, nor have I ever been convinced that stating and restating learning objectives brings us any closer to ‘the feeling of infinity’ which lies at the heart of imagination.” (Andrews, 2014: 62)

A note on practicing stealth:

I notice that I tread on a fine line between boldly doing away with learning objectives with a wave of my arm and a toss of my hair and being compliant by placating the desires of stakeholders (read “buyers”) of the development programs I sell, design and deliver. There is a “meeting in the middle” required for programs are to move forwards. Sometimes I may go farther than the middle, to ensure my plans do not get stopped, truncated or cancelled. Once the learners are in front of me and the

learning is under way, I am far more willing to show my hand and state my position. I am confident that the actual learning -without the learning objectives- will prove itself to be valuable. The stakeholders are most often in the room, so I do not feel I am being dishonest. I take such risks because I am certain that my mission, which is usually to foment some change or other in the organization, is better accomplished in an open-ended format without the constriction of learning objectives. Throughout Part II I will expose some of the tensions that arise from this approach.

Grey contends that theories, which stem from practice, have agendas and that “studying organizations is ultimately inseparable from wider political and social issues.” (Grey, 2013) When we develop a theory we do so *because of* something. There is a motivation, or agenda for change, in observing a practice and developing a theory from that observation. This notion aligns with the intent of action research because of the importance placed on action itself in this tradition, that is, on what will change as a result of the research. The emphasis placed on the researcher’s epistemology and ontology are also closely linked to his or her motivating agenda in undertaking the research to begin with.

I therefore would like to frame this research from an initial intent (or agenda) to develop people (including myself) and organizations from a holistic, more-than-rational consideration. My agenda in doing so was to move away from Cartesian (and therefore prescriptive, as outlined above) models of learning in order to access deeper ways of knowing and improving our selves, our organizations and our world. What has emerged, however, as a deeper, meta-agenda, is the idea that by engaging in a creative, generative, physical and relational effort, we are able to engage in a kind of learning that is free(er) of institutional agendas because it actually springs from the learners’ agendas. I have practiced creating a container for learning/discovery that reveals some of the institutional agendas and allows people to play at changing those conditions and assumptions.

I will describe the theory that has emerged from the experience of deliberately changing my approach to running leadership development events to revolve around an extended epistemology. I have encouraged participants to discover conflict and frustration and failure (as well as success) in their bodies, with more than just their rational senses, engaging with the medium of theatre (presentational form); I have invited them to enter into scenes in plays and take deliberate action, experimenting with change in the moment (experiential form); we have engaged in group

discussions about what we have learned from trying to change a system, analyzing how “playing” with challenging concepts using our imaginations and bodies might produce a different kind of learning (propositional form); and we have all ostensibly returned to our jobs and lives with the possibility of new extended ways of acting (practical form). (Heron & Reason, 1979) The results in terms of the participants’ experience is, as usual in such events, difficult to measure. The quantitative evaluations of these sessions are far above average and generally the highest evaluated activity in the programs in which improvisation and Forum Theatre were included. Conversations with participants reveal that, though at first the theatre component feels “odd,” different or even like a waste of time, the sensation reached by the end of the program is one of great appreciation for both what was learned and how such learning occurred. One possible test of quality of the Forum Theatre approach to learning within Telefonica is that the practice carries on today, after I have left the organization.

I have designed and delivered the Forum Theatre workshops referred to in this inquiry in close partnership with Brian McCarthy. Brian was involved in the first conversation in which I explained my desire to come up with a presentational form of learning that would address organizational and personal challenges of working in the organization. Brian brought his expertise in theatre and together we researched the literature of Augusto Boal to design the workshops. I had many conversations with Brian about my doctoral research and shared my writing with him at several points. We exchanged ideas throughout the process of preparing and designing the workshops. Brian read early version of my thesis and in July 2017 was my “industry peer” in the Practice Viva held with the ADOC faculty at Ashridge. My collaboration with Brian continues still, as I have incorporated Forum Theatre workshops into several of my client engagements since leaving Telefonica. Our ongoing dialogue about the process/delivery of Forum Theatre as well as many helpful discussions about my research and the dynamics of developing this method together form the basis of my second person research. I reflect on some of his comments in Chapter 7: Value and Pleasure, as besides being a co-creative partner in this work, I see Brian as one of the forces that “keeps me honest”, checking quality and validity with me along the way.

Essentially, Part II follows me back into my “job” with my newly extended epistemology (acquired in Part I) close at hand. Chapter Five describes my initial awakening to what I refer to as Performative

Consciousness. In Chapter Six, "A Pedagogy of Performance," I explain how and why this inquiry has led me to defend and enact imaginal, embodied and relational ways of teaching and learning. Chapter Seven, "Value and Pleasure," outlines various viewpoints from which to judge whether my methods and claims hold quality and validity. And for the final act of this inquiry, I offer some reflections on the process of this doctorate as a whole and its potential effects going forward.

I have not been able to resist the waves of some performative writing, particularly when traveling through patches that felt unutterable, or flat, or needed to be meandered through or tasted or touched, rather than worded head on. Throughout this second part of the thesis then, Haven and Keira sometimes charge the stage. I have welcomed these breakouts, of sorts, as I am aware that the scholarly aspect of these latter chapters was running the risk of shrinking rather than extending my own epistemology again. Haven and I have developed a participatory view of research and of knowing together. Keira is a fierce critic and just as fierce an ally. She is discerning and can sniff out any disingenuous palaver.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Promise of a Performative Consciousness**

It was the first weekend in September, and rather than go to the Blue Hill Fair where I would have walked the dusty grounds breathing in a bouquet of fried dough, sweat and exhaust from the generators that power the carnival rides, I hijacked myself to lake Bled, in the mountains of Slovenia. I arrived in pitch dark, raining, too late for supper, and in my tired, soviet-era hotel too late for anything but the cleaning staff and one sleepy boy to check me in. After a beer and some nuts, I fell asleep despite the jetlag and awoke to an alpine surprise. Close perky hills covered with tufty summer grass in the foreground, glassy lake to the left and bold snowy peaks in the distance. A dramatic contrast from the doughy, oily air I had averted. All was crystal.

The hours and days that ensued were mainly dedicated to the Art of Management Conference, with breaks here and there to let my body catch up with me by swimming in the lake and biking cautiously on the crowded narrow path around it. The conference was a fair of its own. We (the conference attendees) buzzed and loitered around the airy halls of the Bled School of Management, a modern marble affair, with pleasing-enough spaces and the appropriate-for-a-business-school sharp angles and smooth textures. I could tell school was still out, as the halls and rooms were wafting with pleasant-looking middle of lifers, mainly smiling, talking intently, listening respectfully and never walking very fast. There was a sense that we were birds from different flocks, pausing here for a bit, taking our breaks by the lake, letting time flow, before we returned to the weightier business of wherever we had come from. We were in a temporary watering hole. A bird bath.

There was a sense of suspension, in the architectural sense of a gravity-defying bridge, in the overall staging of the conference. Artists held up one side, giving spirit to spaces where people made things and showed things, sang, danced and talked about art. From the other side, management academics read papers and showed PowerPoint and made references and discussed, not shutting out the artistic breezes at all, but making mostly words. Many of the birds attracted to the site, some closer to one end of the bridge, some to the other, flitted back and forth, raising questions from both ends, trying to find a place of self-identity in the middle somewhere.

The conference in Bled felt like time suspended, as if the bunch of us had walked through a magic point in the trees to join a French or Russian novel, in which characters are thrown together and spend time debating the finer points of life. I brought several questions with me into the interactions in Bled: What changes when we include a performative consciousness (Gergen & Gergen, 2012) in our approach to learning, communicating and living? What happens when I write fiction or poetry? What happens when people do theatre together? What happens when we make something: a sound, an object, a movement? And how do these actions change the systems in which we operate?

I came to these questions –theorizing questions- after months of experimentation, elation, pain and catharsis... and reading the works of others in the fields of change, social science, teaching, writing, acting and directing. My principal claim, which was reinforced by the Bled conference, is that if we are not approaching our own and others' development/growth/flourishing with a performative consciousness, it is not good enough. More positively put, if we develop and include our performative consciousness in our own and others' development, we stand a chance of facing the world's problems with a far more complete set of abilities. I have adopted and adapted the term "performative consciousness" from Ken and Mary Gergen, who, in their book "Playing with Purpose" (2012) advocate for and illustrate ways of doing and presenting social science in ways that engage us -the audience- more fully as humans and therefor stands a better chance of making a difference. The Gergens explore performativity mainly within the community of social science academia. I would like to extend the use of performative consciousness to include leaders, management educators and learners in general, so that we may think of -and act out- the broad concept of the performance of life in ways that are more connected, interconnected and epistemologically rich.

#### "Letting You Go Joe"

I attended two plays while at the conference in Bled. The first consisted of a cast of two: a middle-aged man who removed his trousers (the scene takes place in the man's home office), and the character of his boss who called in via skype from Wales. "Letting You Go Joe" (Levy, 2016) enacts the story of a man who is fired via Skype by his new boss, who is also his old friend. The former best friend follows a corporate script to skype-fire his ex-buddy in a performance review. Joe is aghast, wounded far beyond the job, betrayed. The boss is hamstrung, caught between the extreme



discomfort of his moral position and his material obligation to either execute the task (and his friend) or be executed himself.

An interesting discussion took place after the play about its content: the role of HR in systematizing life, the disembodied task of the performance appraisal culture and the trauma that ensues. More interesting to me (although the former was interesting as well) was a discussion on the form and media of the performance. I found it groundbreaking to be part of an audience in an academic conference witnessing the premier of a performance that was critiquing the corporate morays that are taking over our lives and relationships. The most poignant critique, in my view, was directed at the media through which we communicate and create relational space. Like water finding its way to the sea, we look for ways of “being in communion” (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010) through whatever means and media we have at our disposal. The most painful layer of conflict in “Letting You Go Joe” lies in the poor choice of both content and form to reach the outcome of the conversation required of the characters. Joe must be let go and even the audience can sense in Joe’s demeanor that he may not be the best of employees. And yet the choices made by the boss (and before that by the corporate entity) to prescribe the content with a script and to disembody the interaction with the use of skype, leave the hero isolated, bereft of any meaningful connection.

I found myself reflecting on the playwright’s willingness to put on this performance and to do so using a risky skype connection (at the crucial firing moment the connection actually cut out, adding a poignant element of real live risk to the performance). Academia, teaching and executive education (not to mention most children’s education) continue to rely more on rehearsed learning than on joint inquiry. To support my claim that learning without an embodied creative connection is not good enough, I will explore in this chapter what is being done in the academy, in teaching practices and in arts-inclined communities such as the Art of Management conference to inquire holistically into challenges with people rather than presenting them with possible answers from which to choose.

Ladkin and Taylor (2010) considered the ways in which Stanislavski’s method for actors can be applied to leadership. They carefully address the potential irony of equating play acting or “faking it” with leadership, especially in the context of striving for authenticity in leadership. As they point out, Stanislavski emphasizes the importance of bringing one’s own experience and authentic self to

the task of acting for the performance to be believable. Ladkin and Taylor extend Stanislavski's method to leaders in order to promote embodied leadership, the relational aspect of being "onstage" (or performing) with others and the choice of appropriate "leaderly" actions that are grounded in one's authentic self. In the final lines, the authors suggest that much use of theatre in management education is lacking in theory, which their article aims to start providing. In the following chapters I will follow Ladkin and Taylor's lead in developing a theoretical base for using theatre for organizational development, drawing specifically on the notions developed in Part I around extending our epistemology and building further on the use of our bodies and of our relational abilities in making change happen.

## Chapter Six

### A Pedagogy of Performance

Pedagogue, n.

1. A schoolteacher; an educator.
2. One who instructs in a pedantic or dogmatic manner.

[Middle English pedagoge, from Old French, from Latin *paedagōgus*, *slave who supervised children and took them to and from school*, from Greek *paidagōgos* : *paido-*, *boy*; see **pedo-**<sup>1</sup> + *agōgos*, *leader* (from *agein*, *to lead*; see *ag-* in the Appendix of Indo-European roots).]

Perform (v.) c. 1300, "carry into effect, fulfill, discharge."

The word "performance" refracts into several divergent meanings: the corporate, as in performance management; the artistic, as in artistic performance; the financial, as in stock performance; the cultural, as in entertainment; the utilitarian, as in performing a task; the athletic, as in the individual or team performance in sports. While the overarching concept of performance is relevant to this inquiry in all its various contexts, my deeper interest lies in the potential of playing on the edges between artistic (or symbolic) performance and actual in-the-world performance. Augusto Boal (1992) pointed out that theatre is life and at the same time life is theatre. Richard Schechner (1985), one of the founders of Performance Studies as an academic discipline, uses the word "performance" to signify the limits between and the overlap of life and theatre. I have worked on developing a practice that sits on this edge between art and in-the-world performance. Specifically, I have worked with theatre performance for the possibilities that it affords to groups of people learning together in three key aspects:

- The imaginal journey: without entering into images of possibility and engaging with the not-yet-real there is little hope of growth or change or *Transformation*.<sup>2</sup>
- Physical participation: by entering into the space of learning with our bodies, we create a (re)membered physical experience that constitutes an action in the world, a becoming rather than a mere imagining.

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<sup>2</sup> I admit to being far more weary now, three years into this line of inquiry, of the term "transformation." It has been used ad nauseum in corporate and cultural settings as the sexy younger sibling of change, to the point where it has almost lost all meaning. Transformation is a given, at least rhetorically, and can therefore hardly be disruptive or transformative in its hyper-annunciation. I use the terms change and transformation interchangeably and sparingly—I hope.

- Relational commitment: the presence and investment of others, as in any ritual that marks a phase of life, a contract or a change, seals the deal with its corresponding “communicative act” (Kemmis, 2008) of co-creation.

The first half of this thesis followed my evolution through first-person inquiry and personal creative production with an Action Research-inspired methodology that I have called autobiofiction. In this second half, I extend the methodology to explore how each of the three aspects outlined above can affect change in organizations. I will suggest that positive sustainable change happens best when it taps into the imaginal, is physically enacted and is shared with others.

## 6.1 The imaginal journey

Playing deeply is a way of finding and embodying new knowledge, renewing energy, and relating on a performative rather than ideological basis. (Schechner, 2015)

One reason for the enduring success of magic through the ages is our deep-rooted desire to look over the edge of the boundaries of possible. (Andrews, 2014: 26)

The imaginal journey begins with the impulse to move from here to there, where here is an oppressive status quo and there is where there is hope of liberation. It is what Freire (1970) calls *conscientização* and around which Schechner's (2015) New Third World -made up of artists, scholars and activists- galvanize: an awareness of otherness or oppression and of the desire for profound change. Schechner touches on four aspects of the imaginal journey that I will explore in this section: awareness of oppression, a desire to emerge from that oppression, imagining liberation and performing freedom.

As I am writing this at the end of November 2016, I cannot help drawing parallels to some of the global political events of the last few months, particularly in the anglo world: both Brexit in the UK and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States could serve as examples of large portions of the population performing their freedom (by voting) as the culmination of the four steps of the imaginal journey. The trap they (we) have fallen into is that of achieving perceived liberation by becoming the oppressor. Freire would point out that this is not liberation, as both oppressors and oppressed are captive in their dynamic of oppression: "Almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors.' (...) Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity." (Freire, 1970: 27)

I have drawn on the field of performance studies in order to bridge an apparent gap between performative theory and teaching. Performative theory in the social sciences opens up theoretical and practical pathways into, among others benefits: more accessible and aesthetic writing

(Richardson, 2000; Gergen, 2012; Lather, 1996), a sense of co-creation with audience and community (Gergen, 2012), embodied learning (Sinclair, 2005; Gergen 2012; Seeley, 2011) and art in scholarship (Gergen, 2012; Spry, 2001; Seeley, 2011). Despite the richness and depth of these areas of study, as a teacher and facilitator, I find myself searching for an approach that integrates performance and pedagogy: as I search for theorized ways in which groups of people can grapple with reality and try to make a better future, I am left hanging both by the literature that focuses on how to represent such theories in the academy (articles, books, presentations) and by the work on how to approach teaching. The question that remains unanswered for me is: how can we integrate performativity in learning processes and in what ways does this offer a fresh perspective on bringing about positive, sustainable change?

In the following pages I will offer two vignettes, representing two versions of the same story: in the first, I narrate the experience of a participant in a Women in Leadership program that I ran at Telefonica's corporate university; in the second vignette, I copy an email to my supervision group written just after the week of the events described in the first vignette. I then offer comments on the unique position I occupied as a potential voice of authority in the organization (as the director of the program) and at the same time a middle-ranking woman coming up against the preferences and habits of boss, team and patriarchy. I will offer some analysis and theory around these two stories. Finally, I will introduce the practice of Forum Theatre as a tool for development and one possible answer to these and other challenges.

Freire proposes that liberation can only come from the oppressed becoming aware of their oppression and rising up against it. A paternalistic, false generosity from the oppressor will never, in Freire's view, serve the oppressed at all, as their main objective for such gestures is to keep the oppressed in their state of disadvantage. Our educational systems, with their paternalistic teacher-student power relations are a perfect model for this in Freire's treatise. (Freire, 1970) The specter of false generosity also comes to mind in corporate training settings. (Grey, 2013) My recent experiences with a course on Women in Leadership, which I share below, provide an example of what occurs when Freire's requirement for the process of liberation to begin is absent, namely that both the oppressor (in this case the corporation and its corporate university) and the oppressed (the women in the course) are conscious of the unequal playing field that they create together.

### *Women in Leadership: A Reenactment*

*Bianca is a 41-year-old Argentinian woman, married, mother of twin girls aged 13. She studied mathematics and worked in an accounting firm for four years after university. She then was recruited by Telefonica, a prominent multinational telecom, where the promise of a growing career and good benefits seemed attractive, especially in times of economic and political uncertainty in Argentina. She has been with Telefonica for 16 years now. She started in the finance department, then moved laterally in the organization twice before being promoted to a director level position in the strategy department. For six years she has been the only woman on her male boss's team of six. She has never been to the corporate University in Barcelona. She was once invited to a course, but the dates fell right in the week of the twins' birthday and she decided to forego her spot. A swap for alternate dates had not been possible.*

*The Universitas email invitation surprised and excited her. She has not travelled alone since before she married Eduardo, and she has never been to Europe! She diligently fills out all the pre-work for Women in Leadership, leaves detailed instructions for Eduardo and the girls, stocks the fridge and heads off to Barcelona. When she arrives at the university, tired but excited after a long trip, she meets several of the women who will be in the course with her. One of her male teammates is in the other course taking place on the Universitas campus that same week: the Executive Program.*

*Before going to their separate classrooms, both groups (35 women from Women in Leadership and 99 people from the Executive Program) gather in the largest auditorium for a general welcome introduction to the week. Jetlagged, Bianca walks into the room at the last second. Some people are still milling, but most are in their seats. As she takes in the scene, her brain scanning for clues and patterns, she sees long rows of men seated at long white tables that occupy the whole length of the elongated auditorium. Looking to her right, she finds the faces of the women she met the night before, sitting in chairs against the back windows. She takes a seat with them, a few spaces down from the entrance. As she settles into her seat and raises her eyes towards the stage, her mind makes a fuzzy connection to a feeling of discomfort. There is a straining happening, unconsciously at first, but then quite acutely she realizes she cannot see the stage very well. The men (are they really all*

men?) seated in front of her, nearly all in crisp white shirts that match the neat white rows of tables in front of them, are tall and their chairs are higher than the sunken plastic chairs where she and the other women are seated, in the back, near the windows. She can see through the first row of men and notices the matching display in front of each of them consisting of a hefty moleskin notebook, a pen, a water bottle and name badge, arranged in meticulous symmetry. There are a couple of women seated at the tables too, she now sees.

Upbeat music is blaring and the lights are dimming. The show must be about to begin. She is excited, despite her fatigue and the straining sense that she cannot see properly. Her mind fights off the distraction of discomfort and she shifts in her seat to try to get a better view. Her attention wanders now and then during the presentation, which is fun and light-hearted, offering some facts and figures and strategic reasons for all being gathered here at this place of learning. As her eyes drift momentarily from the speaker, whom she cannot see at the moment through the large white shirt in front of her, she takes in the faces of the women to her right: some are craning their necks to see; two are looking at their phones; and two or three have grave expressions on their faces; one of them is whispering somewhat vehemently into another's ear. Bianca suddenly senses the discomfort of her colleagues. Something is not right, she muses, then turns her attention back to the speaker, who is describing the joint events the two groups will have during the week.

"Thank you for being with us this week. Enjoy the ride! And now, if the women could please leave through the doors at the back, you will be shown to your classroom. Have a great week!"

As the music comes back up, Bianca and her companions stand and file out of the room. The grumbling rebellion begins as they start to walk back towards the main hall of the campus to find their classroom. Bianca and others are merely puzzled. One or two women are irate. The two facilitators walk ahead, turning once with an encouraging smile to invite the group to follow. The week unfolds in utmost tension. Still, Bianca is grateful and impressed with the course. The conversations with the other women are enlightening, fun and reassuring. The men act aloof, tending to avoid them at meals and gatherings. And two or three of her group continue to fight for equal seating in the common gatherings. Bianca can see the strain on the faces of the faculty, who must be unable to make certain changes. She takes in the point of view of some of her colleagues who seem to want justice enacted for what they are calling "unfair treatment," but Bianca cannot



*see exactly what they want. She decides to enjoy the course, as she is getting a lot of precious reflection and building a warm and supportive network. It is such a comfort to have other women around her with whom to share impressions. On her way home, Bianca is looking forward to seeing her husband and daughters. She is also committed to making a few small changes to give herself more time to plan and reflect. She will muster the courage to speak to her boss about the inner conflict she feels when he calls meetings at 7 pm. She feels lucky to have been invited to this course and some small quality of light has changed in her mind's eye, unresolved, unnamed, making her uneasy, as if a small protective bubble has popped and now there are edges rubbing against each other. Perhaps the angrier women in the course could feel that too. Bianca wonders whether the protective bubble can be restored.*

Women in Leadership: a cathartic letter to my supervision group

*Dearest Tree Group<sup>3</sup>,*

*I had quite a surreal week. The Women in Leadership program I was running turned into the sort of battle that could best be described as a drive across the plains in a vehicle that unexpectedly gets one flat tire after another, in addition to overheating, getting lost and running out of gas. Garages and gas stations are mysteriously closed and mobile phone coverage is spotty at best. This journey would feature one night in the arid plains without food or shelter besides the van itself and some crackers and chocolate. In the morning we would be saved, but then left without any kind of catharsis when the trip abruptly ended and everybody went home. So if you can stand it, I will tell you the story.*

*The Women in Leadership (WiL) program is a four-day event for 35 identified women leaders in Telefonica. It has been running several times a year for about 4 years with notable success. I have been involved for the past 2 years. This week we ran the most senior edition for this year, meaning that our participants were mainly executive level. At the same time, my peers were running the pilot of a new Executive Program (EP) targeted at much the same level but not limited to women, or men. We decided to offer these two programs together to take advantage of the networking opportunities, the extra resources that the EP had for recreational activities and for the general ambiance on campus. As it happened, flat tires started to occur, gradually, then quickly breaking into a general melt-down of the mechanics and of our general ability to cope.*

*The evening before the program kick-off I happen to be in the auditorium when they are finishing the seating set-up: the women have small plastic chairs in one row against the windows in the back of the room. I flag this. Do I ask a question? Maybe not. It's 7 pm and I want to get home. I am nursing a cold. I am told no, we really cannot put up extra tables for the women. And no, they cannot mix in with the others because when the opening session ends we will have to unmix them, and that is messy. But ok, there is one free row at the back. They can bunk in, and some will still have to use the plastic chairs.*

*I notice the opening screen only says Executive Program. This time, because I feel my gut tightening and my muscles losing their fluidity, I make a point of inquiring: is this the screen for the opening session? Could we add Women in Leadership to the text? Ah, yes. Fine. We'll do it. There is an edge of irritation, I sense. But then, maybe it's me, since I am having to poke at things that I think should have been obvious. Thanks all, I am going home.*

*And then I fight all week. I fight to have tables erected for joint sessions. I fight to be heard. I quell the women, apologize, placate, I chastise and bemoan, I plead, I listen, I offer. I am alone. My colleagues are puzzled. Their eyes flit, as they search for a mental reference, something they can grab onto to understand. Patty, the EP program director, is under pressures of her own. This noise of my complaints is bothersome. She lashes out: cancels tables, complains herself and shouts a lot. Looking at her, I am so tempted to shout back, but I refrain, just barely. Our boss's eyes are wide and scared. He looks to me for help. I stand firm. They must have their own tables the next morning. If*

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<sup>3</sup> In our first supervision meeting this group compared our future inquiries to trees and the metaphor stuck. We became and remain the Tree Group.

*we do not have our own tables, I will tell them to sit wherever they like. In amongst...the men. A rebellion of sorts.*

*"I have two formal complaints from MY participants," says Patty. "Two women sat in their spots and they had to go sit somewhere else. Those were THEIR seats."*

*I suggest that they will likely get over it. I offer to do my best to keep the women in their proper seats.*

*On the final morning three brave souls defected from one program to the other. There were no complaints. I did not mind losing them either. They found their wings and flew.*

*Somehow the vehicle recovered on that last day. The sun shone, the radio worked, and then suddenly it was over. We all returned to our worlds.*

*When the emotion does not fade over the weekend, I write, record, remember, reenact.*

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Freire would say that the women in the room needed to become aware of their condition as other/silenced/oppressed before they could participate in becoming critical subjects, gaining a voice and rising up in some way. Only from this consciousness can a desire for change and for a fuller humanity take root:

*"To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity." (Freire, 1970: 30)*

In the example above, the Women in Leadership participants were quickly made aware of their oppression thanks to the configuration of the chairs in the room. I fought for this to change all week, wanting to eradicate what I perceived to be an error, to recreate the fiction of a just university, and yet it was this precise incident that got the women to take the first step towards awareness. Even Bianca, who is essentially happy to be there, has the seeds of awareness planted in her gut. She has seen through a chink in her world view.

Freire's introductory chapters to his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" focus on several threads that feed into my own Action Research-inspired approach to engender action (symbolic and actual) and to transform the world through imaginal, physical and relational work. First, the oppressed –or more

broadly as I interpret it, “those seeking change”- must become aware of their oppression/need for change; second, they must decide to fight for their freedom and that of their oppressor:

Although the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress, it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage for both the struggle for a fuller humanity; the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle. (Freire, 1970: 29)

Third, it is only through real work in the world that oppression can be overcome:

“Oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” (Freire, 1970: 33)

The Women in Leadership course is generally well received: “happy sheets” are exceedingly positive and participants highly recommend the course to other women in the company and requests for participation are some of the highest of all the courses offered within the company. A recurring theme on the first day of this course, however, is a more or less general skepticism around whether and why the company needs a program directed at women for the purpose of overcoming the typical barriers that women face in reaching the top of the organization in greater numbers. The question comes up when we (the facilitators) ask the women what their expectations are for the four days we will spend together: many of them preface their expectations –which range from having fun and having some time to reflect to gaining a clear strategy for their career plan and obtaining the next promotion- with statements such as: “I’m not sure how I feel about being nominated for this course”; “I don’t want to be stigmatized as a woman leader”; “I don’t think we should offer a course that is only for women”; “Why aren’t there men on this program?”; “We need to discuss these issues with men.” As I have learned to listen more deeply to these comments and misgivings, I hear two distinct messages as the subtext to their words: one is that the women’s discomfort has partly to do with identifying as other from (not part of) the dominant group. This presents itself as a painful admission, and perhaps many would be happy to go on thinking that there are no particular barriers for them as women to reach the top and all they need to do is keep working hard. The second is

that, if we are going to address the issues that women face in the workplace, then those in power (the men in the organization) are the ones who need “remedial” help. It seems that many of these women either do not recognize their oppression, or, when they do, they would be more comfortable if the oppressors were the ones to offer emancipation. Freire would say that if they cannot see their oppression they will not work for their own freedom: the oppressed must fight for their own liberation and that of their oppressors and not expect to gain liberation by having it “gifted” by their oppressors as this constitutes what Freire calls “false generosity.” (Freire, 1970: 48)

Reading Freire in juxtaposition with recent performance studies literature, I start to find common ground between Freire’s pedagogical theorizing and the performance work. Freire writes about the oppressed being castrated, in the sense that they are silenced and deprived of their creativity. In a dual world of oppressor and oppressed, there can be no creative genesis, no challenge to the status quo (of oppression). For Michelle Kisliuk, a performance studies scholar specializing in performance theory, ethnographic writing and ensemble music at the University of Virginia, challenging the status quo comes from the absence of duality by introducing risk, aesthetics and community. Her work with African drumming and dancing, both in the BaAka villages in central Africa and in university classrooms in the United States, seeks to:

...disrupt those centrism that are served by dualistic thinking. Interactive performance, embodied teaching and learning, as well as ethnographic poetics and experiential narrative are realms in which mind/body dualisms are disassembled, and by consequence, related dualisms such as art/scholarship and self/other also become blurred or collapse. When dualistic thinking shifts to multiplex thinking, there is no longer one center but many, ever shifting centers. (Kisliuk, 2002: 107)

Dualisms, as both Freire and Kisliuk suggest, accentuate oppression, while “multiplex thinking” allows us to aspire to more balanced power and agency. (Parenthetically, Foucault’s (1976) ironic treatment of sexuality and the history of thought that in his view paved the way to our current still-Victorian concept of sex and sexuality comes to mind here. I have discussed Foucault’s influence in Part I. I choose not to bring Foucauldian notions too much into this chapter as I aim to focus on the performativity rather than the genealogy of our treatment of sex and oppression, as an example of how to approach learning and change. However, I do find it worth noting that Foucault’s *History of*

*Sexuality, Volume I* (1976) highlights the dualism and secrecy that still stand in the way of open discussion of the interplay of sex and power. It is very apparent to me that the incidents around Women in Leadership are an example of the kind of repression and silence that Foucault discusses).

Diverging, multiple views give rise to the rough edges of life. David Whyte, poet and leadership teacher, talks extensively about the rough edges of existence, our need to “hazard ourselves” in work and in life in order to achieve anything approaching wisdom, happiness or fulfillment. (Whyte, 2002) Whyte hazards himself through the reading and writing of poems, leading himself and others to examine the beauty and pain of these edges of life. Reading and listening to Whyte is moving for me, in that it reminds me that the sheer beauty of words and the powerful images they evoke can result in physical and emotional tectonic shifts in my mental and emotional structures. John Emigh, professor at the Theatre, Speech and Dance department at Brown University, writes about the neuroscience of performance and the importance of edges, borders and our visual and neurological participation in creating meaning for ourselves:

In the simple visual teaser of vase and faces, two lines are sufficient for us to perceive the shifting borders between figure and ground and to create two realms of possible ‘meaning’. (...) We are drawn to borders for borders provide the essential cues to form, to category, to meaning. For the brain, as for societies, borders are where the action is, or at least the identification of borders stimulates much of that action. (Emigh, 2002: 267)

Emigh describes in detail how the construction (breakdown and reconstruction) of visual images in the brain fires our limbic system, connecting images to emotions and memory:

To think of shaping performances as a special form of sketch making that mimics the process of image formation in the brain is to stress the usefulness of performance as a focus for individual and group reflection. The progression of images and words provides a sketchlike version of what it is like to be alive and conscious in the mode of performed behavior. That version is offered synecdochically to a group of onlookers for contemplation and discussion. Does it resonate with their separate and shared experiences of life? Does it resonate with their individual and shared banks of

images, memories and emotional traces? Is it a memorable and significant addition to the narratives and images that life and art have already offered? (Emigh, 2002: 269)

The very “production” of something resembling live performance in an educational setting starts us on a path of working with what emerges, with experience, with interpretation and therefore with creativity instead of repetition. Emigh describes the basis for a group to inquire into something as a means of learning as opposed to learning what is already known by a “higher” authority. In staging forum theatre for groups of participants employed by Telefonica, we are seeing people grapple with questions such as the ones Emigh poses above: Does this resonate? Do these scenes play back to us some of the challenges, contradictions and absurdities of working in a large bureaucratic company?

Freire’s work calls for a teacher/student relationship that, rather than replicate and perpetuate the oppression of the students by reinforcing the authority and power of the teacher, puts teacher and student on a level, inquiring plane together. What he calls the “banking concept” of teaching conceives of students as receptacles to be filled with predetermined knowledge, whereas liberating education requires a different perspective from the teacher/leader:

From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partner of the students in their relations with them. (Freire, 1970: 56)

Such a radical pedagogy, as Freire himself calls it, is a potential antidote for company executives who are heavily influenced by a large hierarchical and patriarchal organization.

I shared Bianca’s story above to illustrate that the average participant in the Women in Leadership program is not fully aware of her position of otherness or oppression within the organization and society. Levels of consciousness vary among participants and Bianca displays an average consciousness. The program changes her perception, however slightly, and something has shifted in her and in the organization.

The email with my supervision group illustrates my failure on two levels: most visibly, I failed to make my colleagues aware of their contribution to a sexist/classist treatment of the participants in Women in Leadership; more subtly, I failed to adequately disguise the fact that the Universitas team was (perhaps unconsciously and including myself) replicating the very dynamics of privilege that a program for women seeks to eradicate. Much to my dismay, I found myself trapped in my collusion with the oppressing organization. My shock at not being able to step out of the role of director/organizer/oppressor in the eyes of participants and even my own, produced extreme discomfort and a complete rupture with my colleagues.

In the next section I will share the experience of running Forum Theatre workshops, leading to my discovery that, despite my sense of not having a significant role in Forum Theatre, it is precisely this “loosely held” position that opened up a space in which I was safe from collusion. My role in Forum Theatre has been to set the stage for it to happen and then lead some discussion around it, mindful of Emigh’s point about the power of performance and debate: “Of all animals, the human species is the only one that can make maps, blueprints, drawings, or paintings that represent a coherent mental image and therefore make that image open to social debate and judgement.” (Emigh, 2001: 269) The ensuing debate is what holds promise for change.

The following and final vignette describes a Forum Theatre workshop.

PARTICIPANT X

*When the week began, she told us we would be learning with our bodies as well as our minds. She pointed out that we know some things physically, intuitively, with our guts and with our fingers and knees. There was the story of a deaf woman who was so worried during her pregnancy that she would not be able to hear her child cry, only to discover once her baby was born that every time he cried her hands would tingle, infallibly. Her body knew and was able to hear beyond sound. Early in the week she asked where we felt trust resided in our bodies. Most of us put our hands to hearts, or chest, or stomach. We played with our bodies throughout the week with warm-ups in the morning, exercising our movement, voices, stance, status, collective intelligence.*



*When the afternoon dedicated to theatre began, expectations were high and trust in the group was also high. We were learning, we were sharing challenges and experiences with our colleagues and we felt lucky to have been invited to the course. The theatre professor was yet unknown to us, so this felt different. He looked young and credible at the same time. A good speaker, clear voice, nice face and steady, inviting gaze. I was not too resistant, yet I admit I might have expected the theatre piece to be a frill, a bit of fun, a change of pace.*

*We began with warm-ups that were similar to the ones we had been doing every morning, though they involved more improvisation, such as “give your partner an imaginary gift and see what they think you gave them.” Very quickly, we started to use our imaginations as much as our real context, or perhaps more. We tried out different emotions, responses, identities and roles. I got a bit used to being “not me” but being other things, other ways, other possibilities.*

*When the actors came in to perform the play, I was ready to rest and watch. Ready to let them take charge. Brian, the director of the play, explained that the play would be about ten minutes long (so short, I remarked, noticing that I was ready for a movie and popcorn, some hands-off entertainment) and that in a second round we would be able to stop the action and enter the play to change the outcome. I wondered whether I would have the energy for it. Someone will, I’m sure, I reflected.*

*Very quickly, the play demanded that I imagine. The characters in the play –a boss and his three workers- used balls to represent their work. Some characters bounced their ball, others moved them by rolling them or picking them up, and the boss had a great big green yoga ball that he carried around. This was his “big new idea”, which he was trying to sell to the management while also trying to get his team to “play ball” with it and with him. I noticed that these balls could be any kind of work in Telefonica. They were generic. Because we had been “playing” all afternoon with our imaginations, with making up what wasn’t there, using symbols and made-up stories on the spot, it was easy to imagine these balls as tasks or projects within any kind of area or department in the company.*

*The personalities of the actors were, ironically, the more concrete material: the lazy, individual worker, the excited boss, the harried colleague and the punctilious bureaucrat. The boss’s quest to get his big new idea implemented was stymied at every turn. Even those who were interested were*

unable to get behind him, help him push, see things differently. I had several real examples of my own flashing from my memory as I watched the boss get increasingly frustrated but keep trying, staying positive, believing. It was excruciating to watch at some moments. Do we really do this in our lives, I asked myself, knowing with dread the answer was yes. I had felt this same frustration countless times. But more flinchingly, I dared to wonder, had I ever been the bureaucrat, or the lazy one, or said yes when I meant no?

Round two of the play began. I was feeling less lazy. So much laughter mixed with horror at the protagonist's battles had got my blood moving and there were issues in the play that I thought I could resolve. But I didn't want to be the first. I didn't quite know where or when I should step in, I just knew that "world"—to use Brian's word- the actors had created was flawed just as our world in Telefonica is flawed and I wanted the chance to try to fix it. At the end of the first scene, when Harris takes the big ball in to his team and shows them how it works while they begrudgingly look up from their routines, a colleague from Argentina raised his hand and requested to enter. "Where do you want to start?" Brian asked, "at what exact moment?". The colleague started from the moment Harris enters the office, and he left the big ball outside. He entered, as normal, and asked his team about their progress, the last few days, asking them whether they had had any problems. His team were characteristically polite, emotionally absent and busy, but he did get them talking and looking up a bit. Only then did he tell them about his idea, and only after asking them whether they wanted to see it, did he fetch the big ball and bring it in. I could see that he was trying to involve people, to get them on board before he made them experience the idea first hand. It was a good idea. I can't say it turned things around much, as his team were still resistant, but it seemed to flow slightly better.

Another participant tried to evolve the same scene, then another tried to negotiate with the bureaucrat. The latter led to hilarity in the room because the bureaucrat was so characteristically immune to all reasoning, pleading, threatening, jokes, bribes or anything at all. We all laughed at the sheer reality of the situation!

I finally raised my hand to enter at the point where Marianne, the harried colleague, is handed all of Harris's balls to take care of while he is away in Madrid presenting his new idea to the management. She can barely fit all the tennis balls in her bag and in her hands. She cannot keep track of which is

*which. She is overwhelmed and does not know how to say no. As I already knew the consequences of this in the next scene, in which her home life starts to fall apart because she is such a slave to her work, I wanted to attenuate the outcome, change her fate, make this created world a better one. I entered as Marianne. I tried to refuse some of the balls but Harris, who plays the boss, was tricky. He still unloaded them all, though I did get him to decree that my colleagues would help. They resisted, but I knew I had Harris's support to enlist their help. I managed to get Marianne home a bit earlier by sharing the load. I noticed how, just as in real life, the actors were predetermined to resist my efforts. Things did not turn out as brilliantly as I expected. And yet it felt good to have tried.*

*I think I will notice, in the future, when systems resist my efforts, when things go right back to their former course after I try to change them. I will remember the resistance in this play. I will remember the stubborn attempts my colleagues and I made. And I am sure I will wonder at how similar real life is to the theatre world we created.*

*As we moved on from the theatre to other leadership points and to design our action plans, the shared theatre world we had created became a turning point in our shared learning. We had a common experience of adversity, effort, some change and plenty of frustration. We referred to scenes to which we had all been witnesses. We used examples of situations and feelings that were enacted. We had been through something real (regardless of its fiction) together and this served as a point of reference, of bonding, of change in our dynamics and in our learning. The depth of our learning through an afternoon of theatre surprised me. It was stronger, more real, more relevant and lasting than I could have imagined.*

*(Retold on the basis of interviews with several participants and observation of 17 sessions of Forum Theatre in Telefonica between March 2013 and May 2017).*

Participants consistently emphasize the poignancy of the experience and the learning achieved during forum theatre workshops. The engagement and energy in the room are palpable far beyond what happens in regular discussion sessions. The actors and I have used the following elements to measure this impression: laughter, which becomes ebullient, explosive, general and quick; participation, which starts slowly and works itself up to highly intense –we rarely finish a session without having to apologize for the lack of time, due to which we have to conclude despite people

still wanting to enter the play and change the outcome; breakdown of orderly participation whereby participants raise their hands to speak or enter the play (people are nearly leaping out of their chairs to say something and facilitators occasionally lose all semblance of control); repeated references, throughout the rest of the week, to what happened in the play as examples of various leadership phenomena and as “proof” of what life is really like. Experience is heightened, exaggerated and intensified in these sketches. Emigh’s “emotional traces” are brought out and placed on the agenda –quite literally on the business table- in many cases perhaps for the first time in the participants’ business lives.

I have found a generative blend of seriousness and playfulness at once in the theatre workshops such as the one described above. On one hand, this may be, as Emigh notes, a characteristic of the theatre/performance in general: “it is to exercise our sensory and cognitive faculties in a situation where we are freed from decisions that may affect lives and livelihoods, where nothing seems to be at stake.” (Emigh, 2002: 272) On the other hand, the very “construction of meaning through symbolic representation” (262) of which Emigh also writes, is admittedly both a serious and purposeful aim (on my part) and a seeming outcome for participants: they witness a symbolic representation of their reality and engage with trying to change it as if this were real life. The “seeming superfluosity” that is “one of the distinguishing characteristics of the theatre” (Emigh, 2002: 271) constitutes a double trick on our neurons: we know it is a play, yet our emotions and memories are triggered neurologically as if it were real; we interact playfully, taking risks and trying things as if it were fake, and yet we learn as if from real life, our memories locking in on lived experience from which we gain insight and growth. It is as if, at a neuroscientific and a behavioral level, we are able to nimbly step in and out of fiction and reality, taking the best (or most useful) elements of both worlds.

This blend of a serious endeavor that is at once playful and even provocative has become a central part of the experience for me as the facilitator or catalyst of such events. I now feel I understand the essence and *raison d’être* of Forum Theatre better: I know its playful nature and I know its specific weight, its gravitas for me (and for participants). I know the difference it can make, or not. I know it does not belong to me. I still struggle with how indefensible it seems in the face of certain kinds of questioning, namely: it’s too long, too nebulous, fun but not specific, not digital (?!), it does not give participants a clear take-away. Indeed, I believe it gives participants the experience of

tension that is unresolved, an experience to think about, to talk about with others, to discuss and dissect. It is a living body of experience, which participants create and live through, as do I, and which gives rise to the “social debate and judgment” (Emigh, 2002: 269) which is so central to our being human. It makes us, I have found, more fully human. Schechner asks us to “take seriously those who play, those who create playgrounds and art spaces. To take seriously the personal, social and world-making force of performance.” (Schechner, 2015: 9) My answer then, to those around me who question the seriousness of making playfulness and performance a cornerstone of my brand of leadership development, is that the cost of not doing so is a cost to our waning humanity and to our ability to change our ailing world.

The imaginal journey begins with becoming conscious of a problem. In organizational settings, using oblique and playful methods, such as theatre, can bring the problems of the status quo and of the organizational assumptions to light in a way that is less threatening and confrontational –and offers more possibilities for joint reflection- than head-on teaching or debate. In art-based methods such as theatre, participants are invited to discover the problems together and to play at trying to solve them. The very process of joint inquiry defuses confrontation and allows for creativity and collaboration.

The Women in Leadership course at Telefonica’s corporate university, though it was a reflexive course full of dialogue and collaborative learning, did not include any arts-based learning. Had I continued to run that course (I eventually decided, six months after the events described earlier in this chapter, to resign from my position in Telefonica), I would have built Forum Theatre into the program as a means for participants to become more fully aware of the assumptions and oppressions associated with being a female executive. Even more poignantly, I might have welcomed the chance to explore my team’s feelings and resistance around the Women in Leadership initiative through a Forum Theatre session with that team.

By describing what I perceive to be the participant experience of Forum Theatre, I have tried to convey that entering into an imaginal territory is an important step towards knowing ourselves, our organizations and our complex relationships with and within organizations. The theatrical story playfully reveals aspects of the organization and its members in a way that has deep implications

for our understanding of ourselves and of the roles we play. The narrative, as opposed to balance sheets and targets, reveals who and how we are within the system:

Knowing ourselves, as selves in whom change and constancy are intricately enmeshed, is a project without end. (...) This ongoing narration of the self is only possible through the use of our imagination, as our sense of our identity is a fundamental negotiation between what exists, and what does not exist (but might yet, or might have done so in the past). If we cannot visualize other possible ways of being, then our story becomes 'suspended'. (Andrews, 2014: 60)

Even when the theatre experience barely glances off the world view of any given participant, playing with images and symbols contributes towards a broader and deeper understanding of the issues we face in our organizations.

Being the catalyst of this process from the inside of an organization began to feel ineffective and contradictory for me. My advocacy for this approach to learning was increasingly merely tolerated, despite the success of the theatre activity itself. If I had continued, I would likely have been forced to become more radical and isolated, or more stealthy, in order to accomplish what I thought was most valuable to the people in the organization. A year before the submission of this thesis I decided to leave Telefonica's corporate university.

Towards the end of this inquiry, I find myself working from the margins outside of the organizations for whom I consult. I am guardedly hopeful that doing this work from outside of organizations, rather than as an integral part of the system, may prove more effective (and healthier for me). I notice that I seem to have more authority when speaking to clients about this work. I am repeatedly surprised and relieved that my proposals to use imaginal approaches to learning are met with excitement and trust from clients and colleagues. I find myself claiming this authority more readily, as I am more certain of the impact of such work and the possibilities it offers to change the future of organizations. I do this work holding the awareness that:

Imagination is not innocent, fuzzy and warm. Imaginative understanding can lead us to question the very foundations on which we have built order in our lives. Thus it is that we

use our imagination to detach ourselves from what is familiar, giving us a new perception of not only what is there, but also what is absent. (Andrews, 2014: 60)

Similar to autofiction, Forum Theatre opens a space in which outcomes cannot be prescribed, where communities can see a symbolic reflection of their reality and test ways of moving towards change.

## 6.2 Physical Participation

The ideas that parody and play are strategic political tools, and that identities can be *constituted* through practices and bodily acts, rather than *discovered* using the tools of psychoanalysis, have been key in the development of queer theory as a mode of political and academic praxis. (Downing, 2008: 115)

My efforts to bring embodied and artistic knowledge into management education respond to the sense that we are still operating mostly from our heads and that our heads are far more susceptible to being colonized by power structures that don't necessarily serve us. Our abilities to express ourselves physically and symbolically offer alternatives to this colonization.

My interest in the physical aspects of learning began a decade ago when my colleague Steven MacGregor and I began to include notions of physical wellbeing in business school programs to address questions about why business education seemed to only happen from the neck up. We started talking about this phenomenon in class, offering physical activity as part of executive education programs, and researching and writing about this shift in focus. (MacGregor & Semler, 2011) In general we found that people learn better, have more fun and apply the learning to their lives more readily when they engage in movement, are mindful of eating habits and recovery (mainly sleep) and avoid a sedentary lifestyle, even during a short program of four or five days. Stephen went on to deliver a series of lectures on this topic which he then turned into a book, "Sustaining Executive Performance" (2013) about keeping body and mind connected for optimal performance in all areas of life.

The body as a locus for knowledge, politics, rebellion, emancipation and pleasure is extensively explored in feminist scholarship, where the body is reclaimed as a source of positive contribution by women in the academy rather than degraded and dismissed as inferior to the intellect. Jeannette Winterson does this in fiction and autobiography (Winterson, 1992). Judith Butler (1990), Carol Gilligan (2002) and Belenky et al. (1986) all write about women's bodies as a locus of valuable knowledge that is relevant to the experience we might be able to express in words and actions.



I am aware that the present form of an academic thesis has me writing (and you reading) about the body. We are likely all sitting still, reading or writing, trying to make very rational sense of the ideas I put forth. Mary Gergen's (2012) writing on the paradox of feminism's use of language can be equally applied to our present paradox of using language to discuss physical or artful expression: "If we want to change our lives we need to change our patterns of discourse. The 'language games' constitute what there is to change. Can we lift ourselves by our bootstraps?" (Gergen 2012: 85)

We could equally say that only that which is our construction (therefore cerebral) can be understood as physical. By bringing the body back into this writing and writing about it, I am taking the experience away from the body and transforming it into thoughts and words. Tami Spry writes:

Autoethnographic performance creates a space for the detached voice and the "profane" body to dialogue reintegrating the head and the heart into academic writing, and challenging the construction of master narratives. (Spry, 2001: 720)

Spry is working specifically within autoethnography, while the Gergens are addressing social science in general: Ken as a social constructionist psychologist and Mary as a feminist and social constructionist. I find Spry's concepts of writing from HERE or THERE to be helpful: her performative piece of autoethnography alternates between these clearly demarcated physical locations, where "THERE" is the "field" of her exploration and "HERE" is the place of meta-reflexive processing of the experience. In a sense, she moves between Heron & Reason's epistemological moments of experiential and at once presentational knowing (there) and propositional knowing (here).

Mary Gergen (2012) inquires into feminism's contribution to a performative social science. The Gergens together open new ways of inquiry and expression through a "performative consciousness". Together they emphasize its reliance on relationship:

The kind of relationship invited by traditional scientific writing is depersonalized and alienating. It does not invite community, in the sense of a group of people who care, support and nurture each other, but rather an organization of self-centered individuals forever anxious that their full humanness might be revealed.

When we enter a performative consciousness, all preceding conventions of scientific communication are suspended. All restrictions on styles of exposition are lifted, and the full range of human communicative activity is welcomed. (...) It is in such a community that we can more easily take risks, both in revealing the full array of our being and in exploring new potentials for becoming. (Gergen & Gergen, 2012: 50)

Once Gergen & Gergen have jointly made their case for performative writing in the social sciences, they take turns doing it themselves and even intertwining their two voices in some chapters, blending them, and bringing others into printed dialogue.

Mary plays with language, “roughs it up”, and interacts with influences by other feminist writers. In one chapter she has roughly as many words quoted from others as she does her own, and hers range from serious to reflective to poetic. One of my favorite sentences: “We play at the shores of understanding. If we assent to the bending of traditional forms, then perhaps our collective act may jostle the sand castles of the ordered kingdom. We need each other even if we do not always agree.” (Gergen & Gergen, 2012: 71)

The performance of pedagogy involves the body, as teaching requires a coming together of learners and teachers/leaders/co-inquirers. Even if the coming together is a virtual one, via technology, we use some combination of voice, visual images (including but not limited to videos of our physical selves), and the physical presence of each member of the group in some place at some time, using eyes, ears, hands. Learning is physical, as is the mere act of being.

What has concerned me in this research is the role of physicality in imagining and committing to change as well as a parallel interest in the body of the pedagogue/researcher/change agent (namely my own) in the learning space and in the text.

### **Is there any body out there?**

Anyone who has tried to lose weight, either by dieting or exercise or both, knows that body and mind need to work together to achieve the desired change. And anyone who has tried to change a system, culture, team or organization knows that preaching to people’s heads alone is rarely going

to make the desired change occur. Instead, much of the literature tells us, we must appeal to people's emotions, their intrinsic motivations, and their innate neural paths of action and reward. (Rock, 2009) Tapping into the use of the body in organizational life has been more extensively explored from the psychological viewpoint, however, than from the physical stance. In other words, we know a lot about the effects of change (and stress) on our bodies, but not as much on the effects of our physical bodies on change. Here I should mention that all the work being done on mindfulness, which is being eagerly taken up in organizational life, starts from a point of mental consciousness and connects with the body, creating channels between the two. This provides a basis from which to explore what I propose here, which is the actual use of the body to connect to imaginal processes and bring about change through action. I advocate for the importance of a physical intelligence that is part of our holistic knowing and an integral element in our extended epistemologies.

I will first consider what is being done in terms of body intelligence in management education. I will then explore the treatment of bodies in performative theory and work. Finally, I will relate both the educational and the scholarly theories to my own practice.

### **The body in management education**

The work of Amanda Sinclair, professor of management at Melbourne University, explores the role of bodies in management education, starting from the observation that it is at best unusual and at worst considered distasteful or even scandalous to use our bodies as "sites for new possibilities." (Sinclair, 2005: 90) Sinclair describes her realization that, far from being irrelevant, our bodies are simply an omitted factor in our teaching and research activities:

My conclusion is that we need to introduce the body into management education in a revealing but freeing way – using a focus on the body to find new ways of thinking and being, as well as teaching and learning. My interests have expanded from the obstacle I felt my body presented, to thinking about bodies as sites of new possibilities. (Sinclair, 2005: 90)

As an academic and a teacher, Sinclair seeks to overcome her own sense of “feeling overlooked and underestimated because of my small stature,” (Sinclair, 2005: 92) and in exploring these considerations exposes the gendered criteria that are generally used to eliminate bodies from the classroom: the male gender becomes disembodied in management and management education, where rationality is king and male heads travel around organizations separated from their bodies by a noose; while female bodies, on the other hand, are problematized and seen as symbols for all the elements of life that, in a rational utopia, would be left out of organizations, such as emotions, physical cycles and needs, intuition and the senses in general. All of the “humanity” that is currently found lacking in organizations is represented quite neatly in what is commonly characterized as messy and feminine. Sinclair points out the gender discrepancies that the supremacy of the mind over the body seems to perpetuate and advocates for a more embodied experience that would “see the body as a site for emergent patterns of subversion and resistance in workplaces.” (Sinclair, 2005: 92)

But why make all this trouble? Why would we want subversion and resistance in our organizations? As I read the scholarship -and note the dearth of scholarship around bringing our physical selves to the process of learning in organizations- and as I work physically via theatre and physical images with managers, I find us discovering together that, if we expect things to change, systems to shift, transformations to happen, we are going to have to subvert the status quo, find alternatives to dualism and bring our own bodies to bear on the process of change.

Sinclair addresses -as MacGregor and I did in 2011- why the body is systematically eliminated from management education when it is a clear factor in both learning and teaching (not to mention being out THERE and acting in the field, to use Spry’s term). (Spry, 2001) Instead of eliminating any body practice, Sinclair advocates “new ways for bodies to matter in management education.” (Sinclair, 2005: 92). Like Spry and the Gergen’s, Sinclair is mainly writing for an academic audience, “to make a contribution primarily to embodied reflection – to encouraging the inclusion of the body in the moment-to-moment process of being reflective scholars and teachers.” She continues, quoting Spry: “I am aiming towards what Spry describes as an ‘enfleshed epistemology and ontology’, to mapping the ways that knowing, and not knowing, is mediated through and between bodily experiences.” (Sinclair, 2005: 90)

Although Sinclair refers directly to her teaching and to the role of her body and the bodies of students in her classroom work, she is addressing her colleagues and the wider community of academics and teachers in this piece. She does not share how and what one might communicate in terms of body theory or “enfleshed epistemology and ontology” with students, managers, or practitioners outside of the academy. There is no direct attempt at changing the epistemology and ontology of her students, except through her practice of teaching yoga within the University. I find courageous inquiry in this parallel experiment of offering yoga classes to her colleagues from the teaching and administrative staff of the university as well as to students. Especially in the upper echelons and especially among males, she encounters resistance and direct reproach. This experience confirms her suspicions that bodies are rigorously and specifically excluded from the traditional halls of academia. We are generally encouraged to be as disembodied as possible in our abstract pursuit of truth and economic growth.

Bodies, Sinclair makes the evident link, are necessarily gendered. It is our bodies (although Judith Butler might disagree) and not our minds that determine our gender. By disappearing our bodies, the hegemonic male dominance of academia (which Virginia Wolff (1929) so eloquently associated with women’s material dependence on men in “A Room of One’s Own”) cannot be pinned down, since without bodies there can be no discussion of gender or gender dominance. The academic sex is male by default, as is the grammar of Latin languages. The neutral is male. Sinclair writes:

The disembodiment of management theory in general and the association of bodies with women have rendered male organizational bodies invisible and cast women’s bodies as problems. I suggest bodies need to be re-attached to managers to understand what is going on in organizations. (Sinclair, 2005: 90)

Ladkin and Taylor explore the links between authenticity in leadership and the body. They do so through a consideration of Stanislavski’s acting method, which they say “highlights the inseparability of inner and outer bodily being.” (Ladkin & Taylor 2010: 68) Embodied authentic leadership, they propose, can be achieved through Stanislavski’s three tenets: tapping into one’s own true emotions and past experience; being “in communion” with self and others; and choosing the appropriate physical action within the living contradictions of life and complexity. This view of leadership relies

on physical memory and coherence and opens a space in which the seeming opposition of acting and being authentic is bridged, following Stanislavski's view of acting as a reflection of the inner self.

As the Forum Theatre play begins in my classroom, participants are physically tired and emotionally expectant. As with any performance –particularly one that is carefully introduced in a way that builds anticipation- the audience is eager and alert. People are on time getting back into the room after their coffee. Eyes are a bit wider than usual. Smiles abound. There is a tendency to rub one's hands together and bounce the knees a bit, then settle into our seats lightly. Breaths are shorter than at the start of a "normal" session. The play begins and smiles erupt as Harris, a comical and empathetic character played by one of the four professional actors, butts up against bureaucracy. The audience sees themselves, their own systems and patterns of action and behavior and resistance: they are travelling through their own true emotions and past experiences. This inevitably surfaces present emotions: they laugh, cringe, sigh, groan, hands to face or head at times, eyes rolling, feet and legs stamping occasionally as tension builds.

When it is time for them to act, the audience is hesitant at first, then generally an avalanche of participation ensues. Their entrances are generally focused on the individual's ability to get something done, to "get it right." The actors –the system- are well trained to resist significant and lasting change. Most entrances are frustrated attempts. As more participants try their hand, the sheer volume or collection of entrances creates a sense of common effort: there is a "we" in their entrances and in their subsequent comments when Brian and I ask them: what happened? What did that colleague just try? Did it work? The action becomes collective. The effort is shared. The group is "in communion."

Choosing the appropriate physical action is challenging in any setting. Forum theatre highlights this difficulty by exaggerating the stubbornness of the system: in the play, Harris wants to sell his big idea, first to his own team so he can get their buy-in to then go present it to the management. The team continue to bounce and handle their tennis balls. They are unmoved and irritated by the novelty of Harris's big green ball. When participants enter this complex scene they generally become frustrated at the lack of eye contact and attention from the character in the play. Several attempts are usually made to stop their routine actions and entice them to look up, make eye contact, give the newly-entered participant their attention. In this and every example, the physical choices made

by the intervening participant are crucial to making progress. While some are more successful than others (I have seen participants wrench tennis balls away, comically promising to return them the minute they have got their message across), all are reacting to the complexity of the situation and choosing each physical move on the stage in relation to others. The whole group is witness to this dance that becomes a shared experience with strong physical and emotional references.

Ladkin and Taylor point to the fact that “there is a growing industry in using theatre for leadership development which, although often very successful, generally lacks a well-developed theoretical basis.” Their hope is to “be the start of a theoretical understanding that could be used to assess and develop theatre-based leadership development.” (Ladkin & Taylor 2010: 68) I intend for the present work to be a substantial contribution to that effort. I have found Ladkin and Taylor’s contribution helpful particularly in the physical aspect of bringing people’s bodies to bear in the course of management education programs. As I have suggested above, invoking the imagination of a better future is, along with embodied participation, a key factor in a holistic, sustainable approach to change.

### **The body in scholarship**

There is an old adage that writing about music is like dancing about architecture. What is conveyed in one medium cannot adequately express what is contained in the other. However, in writing *with* music and dancing *with* architecture, new worlds of possibility are opened. (Gergen & Gergen 2012: 166)

Acknowledging that we have bodies is perhaps even more of a challenge when we hide behind our texts than behind our desks. The extolled authority of academics has relied on a wizard-of-oz-like disembodiment that keeps the author far removed from potential contact with dissidents. Other academics may, in an equally disembodied way, engage with the author’s content, but all of this is done at arm’s length. Feminist scholarship began to bring our bodies back into academic and authorial discussions. Mary Gergen pays a playful yet poignant tribute to feminism in her performative pieces. (Gergen & Gergen 2012) The action research tradition has gone a long way towards representing the body into scholarly writing and extends its impact into the actual research

by discussing our extended epistemologies, as I do here, not only in conveying our messages but in engaging in our work, research and lives. (Heron & Reason, 1997)

I am grateful for the sense of possibility and freedom that Ken and Mary Gergen offer in their book “Playing with Purpose.” (2012) They advocate for and unapologetically model an academic, inquiring discourse which is playful, risky and varied. They include dialogue, image, theatre scripts, conversation, fantasy, autoethnography and poetry. They interact with each other and with third parties within the text and they invite the reader –in some chapters more than others- to take part in the fun. Some chapters contain more quotes from others than original words. They invoke their multiple senses and multiple identities to model a kind of scholarship that is free, even wild: “Our job is not so much to convince as to provoke and stimulate.” (Gergen & Gergen 2012: 98) In this divergent work, Ken and Mary both expose the risks they have taken, in life and in academia, and engage in new textual risks that I find refreshing and engaging to read:

For the scholarly community, writing can have especially deadening effects. We appear to each other not as fully embodied creatures, but as ghostly mentalities. We write into a social vacuum, bereft of the corporal coordination that brings life to language. (Gergen & Gergen, 2012: 49)

Many of us in qualitative fields have complained about deadening academic writing and some have even gone a ways towards changing the way we use language in academic writing: Laurel Richardson (2000) relies on poetry and advocates using imagery and personal experiences to bring language to life; Patti Lather (1996) criticizes the abundance of bad writing in academic circles, both in terms of clarity of expression and aesthetics; Grey and Sinclair (2006) offer a very clear appeal for writers to examine the possible lack of honesty in hiding behind inaccessible language. They do so in a way that is emotionally engaging and models what they advocate: a clear, pleasing and honest style:

Good writing is suggestive and pungent, it evokes feelings - relief, recognition, drama, disdain, horror- and bodily responses- the flush of recognition and the sharp intake of breath, the tingle as we feel that this might be showing us something we hadn't thought or experienced before. Good writing is often unpredictable – shocking in its terseness or economy, audacious in its sudden sweep or the intimacy of a confidence. Our



concern is that very little writing in our field has these qualities. (Grey & Sinclair 2006: 452)

Writing is performed and as such it elicits reactions. The chances of obtaining wonderful reactions are just that much greater if the writing itself is alive and vital. All of the above authors at some point come back to the body: to the author's body, feelings and desires in creating the words and the audience's responses, whether these be drooping eyelids or tears of joy or sadness. Writing is performed.

Perhaps more than any academic tradition I have encountered in this inquiry, the field of performance studies articulates some of the main motives behind my desire to teach and work via imaginal, embodied, relational methods. Of these three themes -imagination, body work and relationship- the body stands out as the one without which there is no performance. Some *body* must make a move for a performance to happen:

The body as a medium for learning requires the rigorous, systematic, exploration-through-enactment of real and imagined experiences in which learning occurs through sensory awareness and kinesthetic engagement. (Pineau, 2002: 3).

This is true in the classroom performance and especially in the academic performance of inquiry and writing. Performative scholarship brings it all onto the table, the stage, the page. It comes alive.

### **Workshop notes**

The Gergens, Spry, Sinclair and Grey, and Taylor all focus their attention on the production of scholarship that is performative. There is much to appreciate in their endeavors for live scholarship that jumps off the page, causes laughter, furrowed brows, welling tears or a squint. I see performative consciousness described, prescribed, understood by the academics writing it and probably those reading it, but I don't see accounts of performative consciousness enacted in the management education/leadership development classroom. I see performative moments of learning emerge—in my own classrooms- that do not link theoretically to anything outside of these sessions. Performativity in the classroom, as I experience it and as I study the experiences of

others, is not the continuum that it could be, framed within the wider field, rather it appears as an isolated event.

I have tried to gauge the effect of this on workshop participants. As evidenced in the vignette describing Forum Theatre above, participants are pleasantly surprised, for the most part, by the theatre activities offered to them. Their awareness is raised, imaginations and bodies are engaged and they gain a sense of shared experience and communion. Essentially, they buy into it, which means, for now, that I get to keep doing it. But I have to ask myself, in the moments when my own energy flags, whether this makes any difference in the humanity of our organizations. Would Freire and Boal see these efforts and have faith in a more humane and democratic future? And would the leaders of the company applaud the employees' heightened awareness, or be frightened by it?

I have found it blocking to try to obtain true feelings from various stakeholders on these questions. They allow it, is my most coherent conclusion. They perhaps even admire me for doing something so different. It's refreshing. But most are not willing, I fear, to freely express themselves even in the theatre experience and certainly not in its aftermath.

"Tell me what they thought," I asked my boss, after a high-stakes forum theatre session with the global HR directors from all over the Telefonica Global map.

"They are very happy," he answered. "It worked, you did a great job."

"But do they think it worked?" I insist.

"I don't know." He is being honest. "It is hard to know. So many people did not jump in and act in the play."

And how do we know? Or do we/I really need to know? There are particular ironies in exploring these questions with an HR collective. They find it positive, in general, that we engage in these kinds of exercises with participants in core programs. But they are not so certain it is applicable to them. Arm's length at all times, but let the people jump right in and get their hands and feet dirty. The contradictions abound. I notice I myself would like answers in order to judge, evaluate, feel good or

bad about it. We seem naturally drawn to dualism. I am learning to sidestep, breathe through and past dualism as I take my yoga mat, walk in mountain air, engage in conversations in which I am uncertain, think about proving myself and ease off.

What bubbles up in terms of space, time and power in my own body as I do this work? I need to feed my family. I want to travel and go to shows and eat sushi. I would like hip surgery so that I don't have to give up running and hiking. I want to write and publish. So often these days I feel the urge to leave the space that I occupy, give up that power, occupy a completely different perspective. What will be left behind in that space? What will my relationships to others become? Are these spaces permeable, can I move in and out of them or is it a one-way stream? Just now the waning afternoon beckons outside my window. I can hear my children laughing and making up songs, unaware that it will soon be dark.

Sarah Morton (2008) feels at a glance what a horse will do. That physical knowing is found and lost and maybe found again in my life and work. Where does physical knowing reside? When do we have that instinctive knowing? Sailing is the most physical memory I have of this. Also mothering at times, or teaching in an especially connected group of participants. Energies swirl between and around the bodies in such a way that can almost be foretold, like wind and waves at my bow.

Victor Turner sees the physical dimension as one of the keys of Schechner's contribution to performance studies:

He might just be the catalyst anthropologists need to get them thinking about what Dilthey called 'lived-through experience.' This is not to deny the venerable past and the founding ancestors but to bring the discipline back into touch with the bodily as well as mental life of humankind. (Victor Turner in Schechner, 1985)

Our physical consciousness and presence might connect us to broader possibilities for knowing. Our most temporary feature -the ageing, ephemeral body- feels its way towards revelation.

### 6.3 Relational Commitment

Solitude divides me. I yearn for solitude, to reflect, to do my work, to think, read, walk and gain clarity. And yet I design my days around and with the buzzing movements of my people. I feel the magnetic pull of warm hearts, hungry hands, growling bellies, ready smiles. I fantasize about living alone. I search the web for small apartments where only I could fit, snug, with sleepovers now and then. But there is always a big table in my mind and another big house somewhere. I come and go in my heart.

This inquiry divides me, between the solitary search for coherence and contribution -an individual quest- and my desire to share, test and exchange with others. This was always going to be research with others, and yet in some ways it is still research on my own. I come and go in my heart.

There is a knife-edge that I tread in terms of how much I advocate for theatre, for imaginal work, for poetry, for deep and embodied reflection in the context of my work. In the initial conversation, people are excited: doing theatre and other artistic embodied work with workshop participants is different, experiential, refreshing perhaps. These are the conversations in the outer circles, with people who may participate but are not necessarily stakeholders in the outcome, or at all. In the inner circle, conversations change to something more guarded. Some of the comments I have received include: “You shouldn’t talk about theatre all the time”; “Be careful, others might not understand”; “Please don’t design theatre into this program.” (Defensively perhaps, I should like to point out that I endorse and use many other activities and types of learning besides theatre workshops!)

The potentially subversive aspects of this work are evident in my own language used above: why should learning through Forum Theatre be ‘defensible’? What is there to defend against what or whom? With this question I am reminded of the non-positivist movement in social science, which expends considerable energy arguing why and how alternatives to positivism might be allowed into the academic cannon. Because using theatre, poetry or fiction are not conventional, they seem to need to be defended. I am myself engaging in such a defense, and yet my intention is rather to do the work, to engage people through artistic methods. I will, in the next section, address quality criteria for this work and for its textual presentation.

Part of the subversion in using artistic approaches to leadership development may be the notion that it is an almost surreptitious effort, flying below the radar, which, if discovered, could be stopped summarily at any time. It is fragile, tenuous and risky, as is the way of art. This thesis is hopefully a robust enough argument for using artful participation -such as theatre- in leadership development. Without it, we will not engage the whole person or the power of the whole collective. In fact, the thesis itself is another irony in the experience of this work: I am keenly aware that workshop participants will likely never read this text. It is the actual doing of the work, the practice, that brings them value. Mary Gergen explores this very question in her exploration of how performativity might have a greater impact on improving our world:

In reality, it is more about how we find our creative impulse and how we contribute that to the experience. It isn't the end production, really. Ultimately, is it possible to collaborate and produce something creatively that is better than having research printed in a journal? (Gergen 2012: 100).

In response to this and similar questions, which are published in the form of a moderated dialogue -in itself, a disruptive way of presenting social science-, Kip, Mary's counterpart in the dialogue remarks:

Allowing for intrusions, shocks and surprise endings by focusing the development and production of performative pieces on the audience as the final interpreter, interlocker, magician, sage. This is where the politics becomes profoundly embodied: the evocative transforms into the provocative; and the possibility of social science research's contributing to changing hearts and minds becomes a reality. (Gergen, 2012: 105)

This move from the evocative to the provocative/cooperative is essential to turning ideas into physical manifestations and then actions. Mary asks at the conclusion of the dialogue "whether performance work has much in the way of cumulative potentials. Does it exhaust its 'implications' in the performative moment?" (Gergen, 2012: 115)

My own experience suggests that this depends on the audience: it is first and foremost a group activity, a relational act. In working with groups of people who are engaging with change, challenge and “elephants in the room,” the performance of a play that reflects these issues is an invitation to joint inquiry. Whereas traditional course “content” generally means providing or suggesting “answers,” the physical dwelling on form and per-formance engenders dialogue, questions, a *looking up* for inspiration rather than a *nailing down* of answers.

The provocation brings the audience to the edge of inquiry, at which point they cease to be an audience to become players, a troupe of co-inquirers on a collaborative quest. Ken Gergen offers that “one could even argue that the most important outcome of performance work lies in the fact that it encourages others to expand their potential.” (Gergen, 2012: 163)

The provocation of the audience might eventually (re)occur, as in Ken and Mary Gergen’s (2012) book, in a written text. And yet the real provocation, of which they write and which I have sought in workshop performances, happens on the stage, in the classroom, with the audience. The audience is provoked to imagine, feel and act. This happens individually for each participant, and in addition the effort becomes shared -or relational- with the characters in the play and with other audience members who support, contend or themselves step into the action. This artful provocation incites a collective/relational response.

There do arise ironies, contradictions and shortcomings of performance studies and of “staging” relational dynamics. I find my own misgivings reflected in Bruce McConachie’s (2002) comments about doing this work with what he terms “students of privilege” in American private university classrooms. Like I have, McConachie writes about staging Forum Theatre and playing out oppression of different kinds in the classroom. The students come to realize the double bind of performing oppression authentically from a position of privilege, even despite having lived certain kinds of oppression from within their privilege:

Because they knew they were privileged, they could not admit that they might have been oppressed. Any solidarity in oppression they might feel with those who lacked their advantages made them feel guilty. If it was not “us” helping “them,” the students could not be sure of their own social identities. (McConachie 2002: 253)

These scenes from an American college setting are reminiscent of participants in Telefonica (or any global corporate organization) staging the oppression of a bureaucracy of which they are not only a part but at the top of the pyramid in alleged decision-making position. This “bind” is tacitly addressed in one of the main rules of Forum Theatre: *You may not comment or critique the action on the stage, you may only stop the play, enter as a character and try to change the outcome.* (Boal, 1992) It is more overtly addressed in the post-theatre debrief in which participants share insights and impressions from the acted scenes. I always ask, before we conclude, what was behind the decision of some *not* to act. To not change the represented reality is also a choice, and often one worth exploration.

There is still work to be done to address the potential irony of trying to make our world more just from privileged positions in organizations. I am often able to engage workshop participants in discussions that consider the ways in which they are receivers as well as producers of certain oppressions and injustices. I argue that the experience of forum theatre followed by group discussions around these and other insights constitute a relational act that extends our ways of knowing and of understanding our organizations and our roles within them.

## Chapter Seven

### Value and Pleasure: Notes on Quality and Validity

Quality for Haven is a smooth-ish surface, whether it is water or wood, no matter. It is clean but not clinical, precise but open to change. It includes but is not infinite. It has clean air and her limbs feel free and taut as she moves around. Children, friends and colleagues are close by and secure on this surface. She watches the boundaries to ward off catastrophe, all the while knowing so much of this surface is luck, call it karma, call it good planning. It is a campsite. Maybe it will last.

Quality for Keira is a burning fire, with all its mesmerizing magnetism and singeing threat. She is drawn to it and knows how close she can get before her flowing clothes ignite. Still she makes mistakes in her judgement. That is the power of the fire, always tempting and never twice the same. She dances around it and her people follow trustingly. She shows them how mirth and pain dance together in the flickering flame.

*Haven took on the next phase of her curating with a felt sense of the objects for which her fingers felt affinity: smooth limestone sculptures evoking fertility but also war, cold twisting bronze, forbidding but enticing, and exquisite enamels of tiny bursting reds and blues with the sheen of candy. She took to poking around the edges of what her next exhibit was about, pushing out from themes, extending her perspective of the topic, addicted to the whirling disorientation of looking up from her catalogues having almost forgotten what she was trying to construct: an exhibit on early Islamic art, or a history of compliance and transgression? Which was it and could the two be melded without losing her bearings when the guilty pleasure she sought was the promising darkness of no compass, no light, no stars, just her fingers and a sense of smell. Maybe she would risk it all in this next project, challenge the public, lose her supervisors in the weeds of rational behavior, let the emails and the forms pile up and feel and smell the objects. Maybe she would do just that.*

*Caught, Haven still recoils, steps back, grows smaller. Having been rewarded so often in this life for being helpful, she still reverts, apologizes, backs up and finds another way. But ever so slightly less, each day.*

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*“Some people just show up to work, you know,” Evan told Keira on multiple occasions. “We don’t have to try to save the world with virulent outrage all the time, do we?” She inwardly rolled her eyes at the condescension but felt herself smile benevolently. He was a bona fide good guy. He loved her, worshipped his kids in all their smooth rounded beauty and had a passion for food and a belly full of wine every night. True floods of overflowing love, like lava, poured from his fingers and throat when he sang his songs of love, life and the ailing planet. His sense of fun and compassion touched people as they played his songs in their cars and kitchens. But Keira’s struggles seemed banal, connected to the logistics of money-making mechanisms, all helpful to his world but not worthy, in his view, of her incommensurate passion.*

Bruce Chatwin tells us: “The word ‘story’ is intended to alert the reader to the fact that, however closely the narrative may fit the facts, the fictional process has been at work.” (Chatwin, 1989: vii) The question arises, as to my own work, whether such writing can constitute valid data for social science inquiry. Chatwin flouts the boundaries of both ethics and validity by remaining on the edges between fiction and journalism and between art and social science, residing playfully in this productive zone of disequilibrium.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) refer to “continually trying to give an account of the multiple levels (which are temporarily continuous and socially interactive) at which the inquiry proceeds. (...) A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories.” (p4). The authors’ criterion for good narrative is expressed as the extent to which each layer of this narrative is “an invitation to participate.” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988: 7)

In my first-person inquiry (Torbert 2001), I have tried to position personal narrative as both methodological device and methodology. It is my embodied and primary writing of life, from a sensory and emotional perspective. The autofiction included in this text is both aesthetic expression and data. As aesthetic expression it invites the reader to receive the output and react to it aesthetically or emotionally. As data, it offers me-the-researcher and the reader, evidence of social construction, specific perspectives on events in the lives of the characters, explicit and implicit links to the author/researcher’s life and perspectives, etc. By developing two different characters and telling their stories, in addition to adding my own researcher-voice to the text, I believe I have

given account of the multiple levels of which Connelly and Clandinin write. I have extended an invitation to the reader to experience the multiple levels of my narration.

My intention for Forum Theatre and its community use within organizations has been to create a space where others' voices are invited to emerge, to practice the art of voicing with others, "since understanding is a social process." (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) I see both autofiction and the ongoing development of Forum Theatre workshops as an invitation for readers and/or participants to observe, relive, reflect and theorize about experience.

When I look back on this invitation, I have felt two very different relationships emerge: the invitation extended in autofiction feels well received and accepted: I know this because throughout the crafting of this thesis, my various readers and colleagues have been drawn into the autofiction, both as content and method. I hope you, the present reader, have felt invited into the autofictions of Haven and Keira.

The invitation of Forum Theatre has been overwhelmingly well received and accepted as well, albeit outside of this text: this relationship happens on the ground, in the classroom, on the stage and in dialogue with Brian. What makes it onto these pages is a re-representation of what happens on and off stage. This, on one hand, feels "analogically appropriate" (to return to Marshall's (2008) term) since the theatre itself is a representation. On the other hand, and despite my narrative efforts, the writing/expression of Part II still presents a qualitative challenge: my expression is less gripping, more grounded in scholarship and remains a degree removed from my relationship with the reader. I have followed the advice of Grey and Sinclair (2006), Richardson (2000), Ellis and Bochner (2000), Gilligan (2011), and others on writing and making scholarly writing more accessible, and I believe I have almost succeeded. Still, the crafting of Forum Theatre has been a joint venture, first with Brian, then with Telefonica's corporate university and finally with the participants themselves. What I experience is that second-person research, such as this has been with Brian, is not as easily artfully captured as I am not the only artist crafting the scenes. To illustrate these points, I include a dialogue held with Brian as we reflect on our work together:

<b>Katherine:</b> How has our collaboration on forum theatre has affected your practice?
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**Brian:** When I first started to do Forum Theatre (FT) I was really nervous about the unpredictability of it. Compared to the other kinds of work that I do (classes, coaching, facilitating, designing, writing), FT is really in the hands of the audience.

I have yet to have a workshop that “fails”, but no one can guarantee that people are going to step in and “act”. So one important way that FT has affected my practice is that I am now more comfortable with the fear of the unpredictability of this kind of teaching. Furthermore, I know that when or if people don’t engage like I expect them to, I can use this as a learning to be reflected back at them for analysis - “ok, no one wanted to enter that very emotional scene between the husband and wife, why not? Why didn’t anyone enter? And yet you were prepared to enter the “work scenes” set in the office. What do you think about that?”

In other words, I am now comfortable using not only the prepared points and expected interactions, but also the non-interactions as points of reflection in the class. I can use the “empty” space as learning material.

In terms of working with you, I have also learned some very important things. When I first started working with you, I had little or no experience of leadership development. My experience as a teacher had been mainly training actors, and teaching English as a foreign language (my other work experience was as a writer). You helped me navigate the alien language of Human Resources: learning objectives, budgets etc. More importantly, you were someone who spoke my language (we both have degrees in literature, we both are interested in the arts, we both have a love for language and ideas), but you also spoke the language of business and business schools. You knew how to package this weird and wonderful product of FT. But you also were one of the few people I could speak to about how to design the workshop, how it would work, what we were aiming for. Not even my actors really understood it until we did it, and I’m pretty certain the management of the Corporate University had no idea what it was about. Luckily, they trusted you and, by extension, me.

So, my collaboration with you showed me that it was (sometimes) possible to do really innovative teaching in what is traditionally a conservative environment.

A proof point of all of the above is that the only times I have been able to “sell” FT in companies is when I have had your backing. I’ve tried to sell it on my own to other organizations, but nobody gets it!

**Katherine:** I notice how your view of my role makes me feel much more corporate than artful. At the same time, it feels useful that I am able to bridge that gap in ways that you have been less able to. In what ways have you changed?

**Brian:** I have changed in relation to how I manage fear and uncertainty in my classes thanks to FT.

**Katherine:** In what ways have we/you/I changed the world of our work?

**Brian:** I think we are doing something extraordinary that I don’t see anyone else doing. We are offering a truly authentic experience, as close to reality as you can get, in a way that respects participants’ intelligence, moves them on a deep emotional level, and stirs their intellectual curiosity in a way that few if any other activities do. I do think the FT we created is one of the best things ever offered in leadership development!

Seeley has illustrated (with writing and drawing) her enactment of research that reunites body and intellect in an evocative piece about doing research with bears:

The emotional impact of my encounter with the bears raised profound questions: How do these the expanded ways of knowing in the moment, tip into an expanded way of being in the world, beyond the sheer privilege of the encounters themselves? What is my responsibility to others, to the bears and the ecosystem of which they are an emergent part, to myself? Am I willing to reveal and articulate my living subjectivity? How do I keep dwelling in the experience and not skim over it? How do I follow my train of my thought and weave it back in and out of my bodily experience? How do I re-member the bears through my own bodily experience? I ask myself: Am I willing to be vulnerable enough to apprentice myself to these fuller ways of knowing? Am I willing to immerse myself more fully into the imaginative realm, to “do the work” that takes me beyond thinking about, and into getting to know this

aesthetic, patterning mode more deeply? Am I willing to behave in artful ways that “sensuously frame” life (Arteaga, 2011) and are consciously “making special” (Dissanayake, 1988)? (Seeley, 2012)

Seeley’s questions are relevant to my own work in this inquiry and to its application in the world, vis a vis readers, colleagues, clients and program participants. How have these “bears” with whom I have had the chance to coexist experienced my living subjectivity? Have I “done the work” that might show me –and thereby show them- the “aesthetic patterning mode” that lies beneath the surface of a forum theatre exercise, or a piece of autofiction?

The above dialogue with Brian is an example of “doing the work” in the way I read Seeley (2012): it holds up a mirror to who I am in this work and, indeed, I am slightly surprised by the image it projects. Brian’s words complete the story of me-the-inquirer in Part II of this thesis, just as I invited Haven and Keira to complete my story and its possibilities in Part I.

If you, my reader, come away from this text with a sense of who this researcher is, what aesthetic currents move me, what connects me to you as a reader when I am at my best and worst, and what my contribution is becoming, then I believe I have conveyed my living subjectivity. If I have conveyed why and how the use of fiction -both written fiction and staged fiction- can bring us closer to important perspectives on truth, in the service of improving our lives and those lives around us, then I believe I have “done the work,” however imperfect it may be, “that takes me beyond thinking about, and into getting to know this aesthetic, patterning mode more deeply.” I have been “willing to act in artful ways” (Seeley, 2012) to bring about positive change, with you as witness. I have extended our epistemologies.

### PART III

#### Reflections on Ongoing Inquiry and an Epilogue

When I consider my own experiences of the previous near five years of work, it is the existence of my paid work that sustained me at the times when I wondered about the purpose and meaning to my inquiry. I was always very conscious of my work in the violence against women 'sector' (as it is called by those who seek social change and provide support services to women) underpinning my inquiry, even when that inquiry was taking me seemingly as far away from this underpinning as possible. I knew that if I continued to inquire, then all aspects of my life must, at some point, meet.  
(Morton, 2008)

Sarah Morton's words glance at me, hinting at something they think I should know. My mind races around their space, guessing at this word and that, pulling strings. Five years? Has it really been five years? No, too easy. Paid work: maybe. A wonderfully simple term, snatching all the potential grandiosity that I could build into my title. It's essentially paid work, isn't it? It lets off a light stench, like the lingering odor of cooked food in a stairwell. And by contrast, what are all the other things that are not my paid work, that are just my life? Skipping recklessly to the last word, where is the point at which they meet? What happens there? What writing emerges there?

Perhaps it is my grandiose or heroic imago that wished for this inquiry to be partially a third-person inquiry, that is, as Torbert (2001) describes the term, an inquiry that extends beyond my own circles of people to a larger community, or as Reason and Marshall (1987) explain it in terms of intention, an inquiry that has implications "for them." I might have thought that if the inquiry resided mainly "out there" that I could, despite this action research bent, maintain a clinical distance, perspective, detachment or authority. As I write and rewrite my way through the second half of the work -the part that is meant to be "for them"- I get closer to this meeting point.

It turned out that the intended third-person inquiry, as I have explained in *Chapter V: The Promise of a Performative Consciousness*, perhaps as much as the first-person inquiry, resides in me. I am the meeting point. The territory that I have chosen to look at in Part II of this inquiry -what happens

when I make change happen out there- is work that is indeed done “for them” but is also fertile ground for testing and further understanding the findings of the first person inquiry: I tell the story of trying to apply the theory and practice developed in Part I (namely the role of imaginal, embodied and relational knowing in effecting change) and I find that on this larger organizational stage the need for artful cunning is every bit as necessary in my relationships in order for the work to survive. The people around me -my boss, colleagues and other stakeholders- seem wary of being identified with a true attempt at changing the way that power works in the organization. Under the guise of artful/experiential learning, I am able to get away with doing Forum Theatre workshops. My interactions with some of these colleagues are what constitute the second-person inquiry, which then has an impact as change work for an organization.

Unlike Morton, I do not have the sense that my paid work has sustained the inquiry. I rather sense that my first-person inquiry has suffused my way of doing paid work. It has extended my own epistemology as I attempted to extend *their* epistemologies. It begs the question: has it worked? Or perhaps more critically: what has happened? where has this not worked? Or what aspects feel like failed attempts? Because one thing is my intention, my hunch, my desire which is articulated above as the intention to use an extended epistemology via theatre, poetry and other vehicles in order to access the imaginal, physical and relational levers of change; and another is the actual practice of doing that with others in organizations. Often, where I have arrived at a satisfying point of progress, there has ensued devastating slippage. The ironies start to surface and bubble in the organization and in my own life. Taking steps towards an extended epistemology has often meant damage to my own system, to what underpins me: members of my family have taken issue with my writing; and artful ways of knowing in my work have at times put my own reputation at risk.

So as we look back together, writer and readers, over the work that has been done and the contribution being made, I come back to the words of Virginia Wolff in “A Room of One’s Own”:

One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. (Woolf, 1929: 4)

I believe I have shown, with the help of Haven, Keira and all the authors mentioned in this text, how I have come to hold the position that positive, sustainable change must rely on imaginative faculties, together with embodied involvement and relational connection. Through the various voices in the inquiry (Haven's, Keira's, Katherine-the-narrator's, Katherine-the-scholarly-thinker's, and external influences) I have explored limitations, prejudices and idiosyncrasies that my single, authorial voice would otherwise have been unable to discover and express. These multiple voices join together in a chorus that says that the world is as susceptible to our imaginations as it is to our mandates and plans. Imaginal knowing changes things. It allows us to change as individuals. So too, our bodies hold the power to enact and catalyze change and to do so in communion with others. As I move ahead in my practice, working with organizations on developing their people, my contribution will speak to an approach to change that foregrounds imagination, bodies and relationships. This may benefit the organizations; but my hope is that, at least, this method will benefit individuals by opening a door to the fuller consciousness of an extended epistemology.

What sustains me, my forward movement (even when this is imperceptible)? What holds me, however magically from beneath, from the underbelly as I swim, could be -as Haven's father liked to put it- the womanly layer of subcutaneous fat.

*Men don't have that that extra layer of subcutaneous fat. Men are harder, more purposeful, needless of superfluous fat.*

*"You are developing fat knees, Haven, just like your mother," he would say.*

*He must have thought she would grow to have nice long legs and be proud of them. She would grow to be beautiful. She must. She hoped, fantasized at night about losing pounds of flesh and looking as slight and coy as her classmates. Dainty, barely pressing on the floor as she passed. She imagined handsome blond boys scooping her up effortlessly, tossing her about, buoyed by laughter. And yet her legs sustained her, no matter how short. They lasted and worked hard, they carried her dreams and her slowly-seasoning body and became, some thirty years later, a way to know her own strength.*

I consider sustenance and remember that I have never been hungry. I have been poor, by comparison to my peers, relatives, neighbors, former self and future self. I have been in painful,



embarrassing debt. I have been irresponsible with what tenuous income I had. And I have been hopeless and faithless in my own ability to fix and prevent these fiscal disasters. But I have never not had enough food at my fingertips, even if it was not the food I wanted.

Care sustains me. There is a part of this that comes from wanting to be needed but also a part that is genuine contribution. To give, to prepare, to nourish, to live gazing outward, to sustain the souls and bodies of others is sustenance for me.

A degree of success sustains me. Doing something well, achieving a sense of quality, being praised and asked for more. The perspective of a few months since the pre-final submission of this thesis gives me the reassurance of knowing that this kind of work is relevant and appreciated by a range of organizations. In my new role as a consultant, I have included Forum Theatre in several interventions in various organizations. Two of these have been specifically focused on diversity and inclusion, surfacing some of the threads of this inquiry around voice and growth in connection. This has sustained my belief in my paid work. Purposeful work in connection with others sustains me.

Gratitude sustains me. Mine and that of others.

### **Future work**

Towards the end of the writing of this thesis I was asked to propose a short program for bank executives. They needed to come together from global positions to understand each other and the purpose of their shared function in order to do better and more collaborative work in the future. My intervention was meant to be short, not too serious, but impactful. On a conference call to various organizers of the event (these bankers would spend two whole days together sharing bullet points, power points and touch points), my imagination flashed to a theatre workshop in which we would practice relatedness, improvisation, status changes, intention, irony, frustration, elation and pain. I reeled myself in. Too risky, I knew. They wouldn't get it. It's too far out there. And my retort to myself: they don't really want to change anything, they just want to go on making gestures towards change. And maybe that should be enough.

Two days later, I received word that the bankers had changed their minds. They did not need me to run a morning of team-building exercises after all. Maybe I should have risked more, I thought. Maybe I could have shared with them, in some succinct way, on a conference call with five bankers I had never met, that they may want to access the imaginal, the unreachable, the underlying and the unconscious, in themselves and in their community to access genuine and lasting change. I could have offered them my help in doing so, purporting to know how. And yet I did not, deterred by a sense of propriety.

This thesis is as much about discovering an approach to change that is my own, based on a rigorous and practical epistemology, as it is about me learning to pierce through the safety rail of what is proper and expected in order to fall over the cliff-edge of risk. This inquiry, I now see, can provide an underpinning, a basis, for me to move with confidence on from or beyond achievement and towards performance, for myself and for and with others. The confidence does not mean that I no longer feel the risk and vulnerability. These uneasy feelings remain, even more keenly felt in this more reflexive state, as a sign that I am on the right path to catalyze change. Who I am, in my organization and social/professional circles when I open up spaces for inquiry and discovery, is risky. I risk credibility because theatre and other artful ways of knowing are not sanctioned as fully legitimate or serious enough. I recently read in a book review that if you are not horribly embarrassed by what you have written, it is probably not very good (or you have not risked enough). For me, this thesis stands as a commitment to myself that I will continue to risk, to look for imaginal, embodied and relational experiences in organizations and in everyday life.

The journey is not complete, the destination moves, like a shimmering oasis, and I occasionally manage to grasp something tangible only to lose it again through my fingers. I am still not sure of my role in the Forum Theatre workshops we run: am I the organizer, or the mastermind? Am I a silent facilitator or a vocal one? Am I part of the actors' team, or do I stand at a distance from the "artful" ones? This is a wobbly place where stepping forward into the stage lights could be needed for the experience to flourish, or it could be heavy handed. Staying in the wings could be wise, letting the moment fly on its own with far more power, or it could be timid. I commit to dwell in the ambiguity of having to choose and risking a misstep. Thinking and writing about my life and work seems to offer me a different gait, as I see the value in shedding the obsession with reaching the

recognized success and taking more mindful noticing in each step. My wanting eyes see less and my well-used feet feel the textured ground.

## Epilogue

In early January I was at Ashridge, under the temperamental English skies, where I met with James, my doctoral supervisor. He was in the midst of a workshop with the next doctoral cohort behind ours and, I imagined, caught up in their learning and group dynamics as well as the changing organizational seas at Ashridge.

“What is this all really about?” James asked.

He seemed to be suggesting that I had got to a point in this inquiry and its writing up where a larger question, a greater, deeper purpose might be showing itself to me, or at least it was to him.

A week later, I woke up on a pale Saturday morning, mercifully free of any rush and responsibility, in what felt like a quantum interstice of inquiry. A wrinkle in my awareness had suddenly let me in. I was still swimming towards the surface of full consciousness and could hear the church bells calling out the time. Clear glimpses of what I have learned flashed with each striking bell and my waking mind had to decide with each one whether to keep counting, so I could know the hour, or catch the glimpsing answer that promised to be true, however fleeting.

“What have I learned?” is the question that keeps ringing after the bells have stopped. “Where does this leave me and, I suppose, my work, my life?”

I have learned about people, that they will generally come to the chance of learning with openness and integrity, that they don’t have many chances for this, and that many of them will take the chance wholeheartedly to push through to a greater sense of themselves. And yet for many individuals there is too much at stake to take radical action, to change what is morally being demanded and to make their revelations public. We hide from the light of our own learning, shying away from battle.

*“Take me, for example,” says Haven, peeking in to the library stall. “My wholesome girlhood is a myth without which I cease to be myself. I greet myself, with the comforting assurance that I will uphold the structures that keep me from being free, from expressing my true feelings, from being happier.”*

I have learned that people will risk a bit: bring their bodies, their memories (some of them), and seldom their souls.

I have learned -as I suspect “they” have as well- to stay away from painful threats, to retreat and protect myself against the hurtful needs of others.

And I have learned that not much is safe. Safety is perhaps the most fragile of the things we seek. I look at my children, who cling to the safety of family unity because they must sense how fragile it is. They fight to preserve it, to stave off the threats and ghosts of the unknown.

I have learned just how much I have to hide to remain myself. What happens if I stop hiding?

I have inquired by testing one life against another. I have watched myself be one person, then another, then the first again, and emerge none the wiser. I have noticed myself not learning, resisting evolution despite myself. I have remained and reinforced some of the ties that bind me. I have ridiculed my own fear and condemned my own cruelty and coldness. I have wondered at my ability to persist in the banal torture of other players in my drama. And I have felt all along in the rumblings inside me and in my stinging tears that I still think I am good. I long to acknowledge and love the self that is flawed.

Yet how prepared am I to bear these deliberations and foibles for all to see? The easy and apparent answer is that I am not. I am not prepared or willing, in spite of so much inquiry, just like the participants in Forum Theatre. And yet my observation is that we keep trying -I do, and course participants do, and colleagues do- to bring our whole selves, make ourselves vulnerable, explore the interstices of our weaknesses and wayward penchants in the hopes of making ourselves and each other better. We gather in the magic meeting of sincere, albeit partially hidden, hearts.

\* \* \*

*Haven felt she had almost always been prudent. She made proper plans for the events in her life, from dinner parties to career choices. Strategic, the systems and models called her: a good strategic*

*thinker and implementer. She made sense of things for herself and for others. How was it then, she thought, as she made her way through the office building to announce her resignation to her superiors, that she was now following this impulse to quit?*

*"Is your decision made?" Peter asked, "or is this the start of a conversation?"*

*She hesitated.*

*"Pretty much decision made," she answered, not wanting to lead them astray or be perceived as manipulative. In hindsight, she would regret this just a bit. Who knows what might have surfaced in that never-held conversation?*

*"What are you looking for?" Pablo asked.*

*"Independence," she replied, knowing the answer was stuck somewhere within. "And a continued path of learning and teaching. I feel I can contribute more to changing organizations from outside them than from inside."*

*Next challenge: her colleagues. This makes it real, she thought. "I will go in, catch half of them before lunch, break the news, smile slightly meekly so they know I am not gloating, and repeat the same after lunch. The word "mercenary", especially the way her welsh colleague said it, with an almost French "MEUH..." sound and a puckered expression came to mind, as she went through the motions. She paid service to emotions, hers and theirs, some more genuine than others, but in the end she had forsaken them. They would continue to be the children of this fate, this organizational story, while she prodigally stepped out into the world. She would come back and tell the tale perhaps, see what they became, keep ties enough to admire their evolution and sometimes imagine she had stayed. Haven could see all these phases rushing forth in her imagination. The deed was done, doing, gone. The present had a strange blue quality of being played back from a distant future. That was a moment, her peripheral vision seemed to tell her. Just a moment gone by, like January almond blossoms, crystal clear and sharp in the landscape and then gone without a trace.*

*It had been total of two days of breaking news, sending in official notices, signing, initialing and anticipating the extra cash at the end of her contract. Let's not kid ourselves, the money was going to feel as good as any of this, she knew. Haven marveled, in hindsight and even as she did it, at the nonchalant bravery of sticking in the sword. Clean in, then what goes in must come out, pay no heed to the bumps. Job done and it was only Tuesday!*

*The next two weeks dragged on. No shocking news, no wrenching decisions, no emotional strife. Just life, but with a newly developed muscle for recklessness. What if I keep on felling the trees in this overgrown forest? Leave the family home, cut ties, run wild? What child might emerge, what scourge enfleshed in prudent girl?*

*\*\* \*\**

*Keira's stained cowboy boots dragged in the dusty hot dirt as she walked to her van. Leila, the chocolate lab that almost caused her son to forgive her divorce, panted in the driver's seat.*

*"Leila, move!"*

*She would have, anyway, she knew, but talking to Leila provided a sounding board in the solitary months of summer. Her children off at various summer camps and jobs, Keira languished for a few weeks in the solitude she craved and feared. It left her hands twitching, her stomach rumbling and her voice atrophied from lack of use. Thank god for Leila, especially in the first week. After that she settled in, became accustomed to the voice in her head that told her what to do and when. Not guided by the needs and demands of family, she might have lost her way or frozen, paralyzed for lack of urgency.*

*Slowly the days stretched out and her breathing slowed to the cadence of the tides and summer breezes. The house was haunted, she realized, by would-be laughter, fights and most of all by songs that would have been. She could almost hear the notes hanging behind doors, leaking out of corners, harmonies on wavelengths never joined. Except in her bedroom-with-a-view, where reflections of blue waters danced on the pale green walls that held her in her keep. These walls, guarded from any ghost, were hers from the outset. No wandering guests could claim a stake. She did not keep her*

*lovers out, but their auras did not remain among the sheets and shadows. They faded as her own scent and voice saturated this sanctum.*

*Children would return. Keira owned her fear that they now loved her less, dethroned as she was from any heroic status of the past.*

*“I am alone, imperfect and not as brave or reckless as I seem,” she told them once. Would they remember? Would they know her and forgive her? Time and pain and more time would wash over them like waves. Nothing to be done really, except our best.*

\* \* \*

Haven notices her inner states of being: heavy guilt, like a gilded ball in her abdomen; pride as the swelling of her chest evokes a bird leading her chicks; cold hands as her heart thumps out a frantic death march when her man walks out, packs a bag, leaves, and it’s all her fault; the stickiness of the eyes and ears of her children as they monitor, even as they try not to, her secret conversations.

Paul, Haven’s poet friend, has said and asked:

“I think there is something for you in both inquiry and life, about self and consciousness. And maybe that this throws up inner conflict for you? Your characters are conflicted and incomplete alter-egos. I get the sense there is another layer down in your inquiry (life too?) that you are reluctant to unearth. If true, what are the fears that you are evading?”

And then Paul again, a day later:

“I’m left wondering about your fear... and thinking that I may somehow evoke fear in you, or at least unseat some fears already in existence.”

*Haven sighs, not altogether peacefully, after rereading these messages from Paul.*



*"I have no time for this," she tells herself. A soft pop in her gut calls her foul. With restless hands, she writes back that she will consider over the weekend.*

*"Write fearwards," a wise advisor had told her.*

*"Live fearwards," she told herself, guardedly, making tea and looking out at a steely grey sea.*

*What does the perfect surface of these waters know of consciousness, of its own contamination, of a future state or reckless hope for better?*

*The planetary working of the sky, sea, swooping birds and bending trees sucked away her will to reason on this still, grey morning. She could feel an absence on her skin, as if the flat, misty water were drawing its energy from the heat of her own surface, leaving her there as a common object: expendable and good nonetheless.*

*So what about my fear? Haven asks herself. The question throws up avenues for exploration in an area that she has been bumping around in, as in a room with no doors or windows, for days. Indeed, what is the pattern in how she relates to these figures who take an interest in her? She lets them in, only slightly and then holds them to a place, static, almost invited further now and then, but neither coming in or out of her soul. Just static. She keeps them there, whether out of propriety or self-protection from the mess bodies can make. She asks herself these questions in the presence of the surrounding cove. The absence of any event is her witness.*

*And the next day, Paul again:*

*"The other side of evasion, fear and erasure lays enchantment, love and magical journeys."*

*"Consciousness," she tells Paul, "traces my steps as I walk out into the swamp of my trespasses, step by mucky step, knowing with every heavy lifting of my feet that I am wading out into the middle of trouble. I put the swamp there, where there could have been a lake or a field. My heart said swamp and my eyes turned my feet that way. As long as I am not entirely conscious, I can forget that I invented the swamp. I can feel the wonder of coming upon it by surprise."*

*Paul listens, faithfully, at attention but serene, like a good hunting dog in his time off.*

*“When I am in my swamp, there is a lovely little island that rises out of the mud. It has beautiful bold rocks and moss and grassy glades. Oh, the fun and beauty and passion on the island is warm and crisp and perfect. My feet dry quickly and I can almost forget about the swamp. If only I could stay on the island, Paul, I could hide from self and consciousness. It is tempting to try, but I have to go back to the swamp for water. And it all comes rushing into my bucket.”*

*Haven cannot stand to be at fault, to be caught out, to feel the heat rising up her cheeks, draining right out of her hands that hang limp and cold and heavy against legs she can't feel. Like the blast of walking into a hot subway, the shock of disapproval throws her back, leaves her mind in helpless slow motion. Then the whirling pit from her chest down into her stomach, a deadly whirlpool of fear, shame, irrecoverable love.*

*Where is her love of self when the whirlpool starts to spin? How does it drain so fast? Where is the will to stand and fight for the world she has built, the work she has done and the road she must take, alone with her dismantled honor? How can one good person be so often in the wrong?*

*Wrong is where she might choose to dwell, you might say. Some structures keep her there, safe in her covey of mistakes, half truths, disappointing endings after hopeful beginnings.*

*“I am loved,” she tells herself. But then, when she is not, when blame descends, she easily agrees to repent.*

\*\*\*

How does one love oneself these days, truly? Not photographically or graphically or numerically or journalistically but with a deep current of love, compassion, affection, care, sweetness and strength?

Constructing stories is one way to help me walk through swamps. Can't face the question of self-love? Follow Haven and/or Keira for a day, look around instead of in. I follow these ghosts playfully, in the spirit of an experiment that can be kept or thrown away. But the teachings of my ghosts remain with me, showing me ways to look inwards with curiosity, whether or not I like what I find.

The play, the artifice, allows for truth.

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